

# *Meeting With Christ*

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Practical and Exegetical Studies on the Words of Jesus Christ

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Based on sermons of Pasteur Eric Chang

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## **DO NOT GIVE WHAT IS HOLY TO DOGS**

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### **Matthew 7:6**

At the beginning of Matthew 7, the Lord Jesus said that we are not to judge others. The Christian should never adopt a judgmental attitude. On the other hand, this doesn't mean that we should be without discernment. We are not allowed to condemn people but we should be able to assess what kind of people they are. And in Matthew 7:6, Jesus asks us to beware of people who are like dogs and pigs. Here we read the following statement.

*Matthew 7:6. Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces.*

### **The sinful human nature compared to dogs and swine**

In this warning, the Lord Jesus asks us not to take a holy thing and throw it to the dogs. We should not take pearls and throw them before swine. This was meant to indicate that certain people are being described as dogs and swine. And that, of course, is not exactly a very flattering remark. Nobody likes to be compared to a dog or a pig. I don't think that Jesus was trying to insult anybody here. The fact is that there is no better way to describe the character of certain people than by these pictures. The truth is not always nice to listen to. If it is true that you are dirty, well, then, you are dirty. What other words can we use? It is not meant to be an insult. It is simply the plain truth. And there are people who can truly and justly be described as dogs and pigs.

I think that when you come to know the spiritual filth and degradation of sin, you would say that the picture of swine and of dogs is really no exaggeration of the condition of people who are degraded in sin. And this is the point that Jesus wants to make by this comparison. By this picture of dog and swine, He is speaking of people in sin. He is characterizing the human nature, the carnal nature in man, which is lost and degraded in sin.

The Lord Jesus is saying, 'The sinful nature of man, what is it like? The sinful nature of every human being is like the dog and it is like the swine. If your nature has not been changed yet, if you have not been born again by the power of God, then I am sorry to say that spiritually you are like the dog and the pig.' No matter how beautiful you may be on the outside, the truth is that inside of you, you are ugly. God looks at your sinful heart and He says, 'You are like a dog. You are like a pig.'

### **Dirty animals**

What can we say about dogs? The dogs that Jesus is referring to are not the cuddly pets with wagging tails and friendly behavior that people keep in their houses. These are wild or half wild

animals that roamed the streets and hills, with their tongues hanging from their mouths, looking for food in the garbage dumps of the village. These dogs can be quite fierce and they are able to attack man. They devour carcasses and would not hesitate to eat humans. We find in 1Kings 14:11 that dogs actually eat the flesh of people who were killed. *Anyone belonging to Jeroboam who dies in the city the dogs will eat.*

Now, the Lord Jesus says, 'You must not give what is holy to dogs.' What does this mean? 'What is holy' refers to the flesh used for sacrifices. Under the Jewish law, the animals that were sacrificed on the altar were considered as holy and only certain people could eat it. The priest could eat of it. You will find in the OT that strict regulations were laid down on the eating of sacred offerings by priests and non-priests (Exodus 29:33-34; Leviticus 22:10-16; Numbers 18:8-19). The point to remember is that the flesh of a sacrificial animal is holy and you could not take any part of that animal and throw it to the dog, not even a bone. No Jew would think of giving holy food to these unclean animals. To give consecrated meat as food for dogs would be considered as blasphemy.

Pigs are also considered as unclean animals. Pigs and dogs are often coupled together in the Bible and are both emblems of badness and uncleanliness. In fact, the pigs and the dogs are simply two descriptions of the same thing. They both refer to the same type of person. Therefore what is said of one can be said of the other. It was unthinkable for a Jew to give consecrated food to a dog, regarded as an unclean animal. It is equally unthinkable that something as valuable as pearls should be thrown to a pig, another unclean animal.

### **The love of evil**

The apostle Peter uses the picture of dog and swine to tell us something more about the carnal human nature and its love of sin and evil. This is what he says in 2Peter 2:22.

*2Peter 2.22. But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: "A dog returns to his own vomit," and, "a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire."*

Again, the dog and the pig are found together. And here, Peter describes the pig as an animal that loves filth and dirt. He says that after it is being washed, it returns back into the mud. Think of that. You take the trouble to wash a dirty pig. You make it all nice and clean. Then you let it go out. And what does it do? The pig loves the dirt so much that as soon as it sees some mud, it jumps in it and rolls itself in it. By this picture, Peter tells us the unpleasant truth that there are some people who call themselves Christians who are just like pigs. They have been washed. They have been baptized. They go to church. They do all the Christian things. But the problem is that their nature has not been changed. They still retain their corrupt old nature. When nobody is looking at them, they go where they can find dirt and filth, and they have a nice little roll in the mud. 'These people,' the apostle Peter tells us, 'these people who claim to be Christians but who have gone back into sin, they are like the pigs who go back into the mud.'

And the dog is also a filthy animal. Peter tells us that it has the disgusting habit of returning to its vomit. We have here the picture of a dog who, being sick with what it has eaten, casts it up again and afterwards returns to it and licks it up. The filthiness of sin is expressed by the vomit of a dog. A false Christian is compared to a dog that goes back to what it has previously rejected. He has rejected for a while the wicked life that he had. But now, forgetting all the uneasiness he felt about it, he returns to his old sinful course of life.

The attraction of sin. The pleasure of sin. For indeed, how can one find sin attractive if he can't enjoy it? So this picture of dogs and swine describes to us the human nature in its natural state and its love for sin.

They also serve as a picture of what is aggressive and vicious. Pigs and dogs can be very aggressive. Imagine the situation that Jesus is sketching. There is a man holding a bag of precious pearls and he is facing several wild dogs and wild pigs. They stare at him. By their threatening behavior, he knows that they are hungry. So he decides to take out his pearls and he sprinkles them on the street. Thinking that the pearls were bits of food, the animals pounce on what fell on the ground. But they quickly realize that they are uneatable. The pearls are too hard to chew and they have no taste. This made these hungry animals extremely angry. They spit out the pearls, turn on the man and tear him to pieces. Human beings can be just like that. I am sure that you have all seen people who became enraged because they didn't get what they wanted. And you also saw the evil that came out of these people when they are in that state. The viciousness and aggressiveness of the human nature in its natural state, nobody can deny its reality.

### **Parallelism between 'holy things' and 'pearls'**

So the picture is about dogs and pigs, to which 'holy things' and 'pearls' are given. Let us consider what the Lord Jesus means by 'holy things' and by 'pearls.' A common mode of expression in the Bible, especially in Psalm and in Proverbs, is called 'parallelism' in which one element of a sentence answers to another. The same thing is stated in parallel form. We alluded to this when we talked about the linking of dogs and pigs. We mentioned that pigs and dogs are two descriptions of the same thing because they stand in parallel to each other. Here the word 'pearls' stands in parallel to 'what is holy.' 'Pearls' and 'holy' stand in parallel in the sense that they illustrate each other. Hence a pearl pictures to us what a holy thing is like. This tells us right away that when the Lord Jesus speaks about pearls, He is thinking about something that is holy.

Now, what do pearls tell us about what is holy? You all know what a pearl looks like. A pearl is shiny and creamy white in color. It is white in its purity. When we look at a pearl, we are immediately impressed by the whiteness of its color, by its purity. In the Bible, white symbolizes purity. And holiness is always expressed in its purity. Holiness is the opposite of what is sinful and filthy. You can see that it is the opposite character of the swine and the dogs that love filth. The purity of the pearl stands in contrast to the dirt of sin.

The second thing we notice about a pearl is that it is round in shape. And roundness expresses of course perfection, completeness. That is exactly what holiness is. Holiness is perfection. It is completeness. When it comes to holiness, perfection means the completeness of our love and dedication to God. When the Bible tells us that we must be perfect, the expectation is not that we must become sinless. It has to do with a perfect devotion to God. What kind of person is perfect and holy in the Bible? It is the person who loves God with all his heart, his soul, and his strength. And a person who loves God in this way stays away from sin.

There is a third thing that we learn about the pearl. A pearl is developed through suffering. As you know, a pearl comes when a bit of sand goes into the oyster. In its discomfort, in its suffering, the oyster secretes a substance that covers the sand and which eventually becomes a pearl. In that sense, the pearl is the product of suffering. There is an aspect of holiness that is related to suffering too. The Christian is born out of the suffering and death of the Lord Jesus. We have been made righteous on the basis of Christ's perfect righteousness who suffered and died for us.

But we have our share of suffering too. It is the suffering that comes when we count the cost of discipleship. It is the suffering that we have to endure when we break with the world. When we walk on the path of holiness and truth, opposition is to be expected. The disciples of Christ should not be surprised when they are ridiculed for the sake of the truth. That is why the Lord Jesus says at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, 'Blessed are you when you are persecuted for righteousness' sake.' And those who have suffered with the right spirit know what holiness is.

The apostle Peter makes the connection between holiness and suffering in this interesting statement. He says in 1Peter 4:1, *He who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin*. Suffering with Christ puts an end to our connection with sin. Those who have suffered have become holy in the sense that they have no more to do with sin in their lives.

Finally, we can say that pearls are enormously valuable. That is why there is a parable of Jesus that talks about a man who, in order to obtain that one pearl, had to sell everything he had. Genuine pearls are very expensive. Why are they so valuable? Because they are beautiful and rare. A big natural white pearl is very hard to come by. There are many dogs and swine in the world, but not many pearls. Holiness is also hard to come by. In our darkened world, sin is everywhere. People who live righteously are very rare to find.

## **Don't push**

What then is at the same time spiritual, holy, pure, perfect, and priceless? In the context of our passage, the Lord Jesus is talking about the gospel of the kingdom. The holy thing, which stands in parallel to the pearls, represents the eternal and precious message of the gospel, the 'word of righteousness' as it is called in Hebrews 5:13.

Now, if that is the case, and if the pigs and the dogs refer to unbelievers whose nature has never been renewed by God, does it mean that this metaphor is a prohibition to preach the good news to those who don't know Christ? Of course not! It is clear in the Bible that the Christian is urged to use every opportunity to share the gospel. The great commission is to go and make disciples of all nations, and that obviously involves preaching the gospel to unbelievers.

What then does this passage mean? How do we apply it? In plain words, the Lord Jesus is saying, 'Don't take the gospel and throw it to those people who glory in their shame like the dogs. Don't take the precious pearls of the gospel and throw them to those people who love sin like pigs.' Why not? Because they don't appreciate the gospel. They regard it as foolishness. The dogs and the pigs are not just unbelievers. They are unbelievers who had an opportunity to hear the gospel but have decided to reject it. Some might even have been enraged by it. The word of God is not to be laid open to abuse and mockery. We must use discernment. How do you know whether a person is a dog or a swine in his character? Well, you won't know until you present the gospel to him. The gospel is to be preached to everybody. But when a person has heard the gospel and he rejects it, the Lord Jesus says, 'Don't keep pushing the gospel at him. Don't throw it at him.'

It is no use to try to explain Christianity to someone who just wants to mock and argue and ridicule. It accomplishes nothing good. When we persist beyond a certain point in offering the gospel to such people, we are just inviting them to reject it with contempt. And Jesus' advice is 'don't push it.'

Jesus applied the same principle to the twelve apostles when He sent them out on their first mission. He warned them that they will meet two kinds of people. Some will be receptive to their message, others will not be receptive. And He went on to say, 'When you preach in one place and they reject you, then you go away from them. ... *When you depart from that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet* (Matthew 10:14). The point of the instruction is that from now on, the disciples will have absolutely nothing to do with them, not even to have the dust of their town or village on their feet. That is pretty severe, isn't it?

The apostle Paul also followed this principle in his missionary journeys. On the first journey, some Jews were jealous of Paul and Barnabas' success and they tried to contradict their preaching. In response, Paul and Barnabas said, *It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the*

**Gentiles** (Acts 13:46). Later when the Jews incited the leaders of the city to drive them out, we are told that Paul and Barnabas ‘shook off the dust from their feet’ as a sign of protest (Acts 13:51).

Similarly on the second journey, when the Jews opposed Paul, he shook the dust from his clothes and said, *Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles* (Acts 18:6).

In these examples, we see Paul going away from those who reject his preaching. ‘Because you consider yourselves unworthy of the gospel, I turn to the Gentiles. I am not preaching to you anymore. I bring these pearls to the Gentiles.’

### **Witnessing with sensitivity**

In conclusion, we are to be very careful in our handling of the truths of the Bible. What Jesus is asking for is discernment. If a person has had plenty of opportunity to hear the gospel and he does not respond to it, we must not continue to insist. We are not to cheapen the gospel of Christ by giving him an occasion to trample on it. On the other hand, the fact that Christians should not throw their pearls to dogs and pigs does not constitute a justification for neglecting verbal witness. Don’t say that there are only vicious dogs and pigs out there and therefore, you are justified not to evangelize.

Remember also that you can proclaim the gospel both by your words and by your life. When you don’t talk, let the holiness of God be seen in your life. We are like a shop window. Or to use another picture, Paul says, ‘You are the letter of the gospel written in words that people can see. You are the living words of God’s message of salvation. Through you, people can see the gospel.’ And perhaps one day, they will long for holy things, for these pearls, and they will come to you and say, ‘What must I do that I may have these pearls too?’