

Don't Cast Your Pearls Before Swine

by Tim Conway

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Scripture: Matthew 7:6, Proverbs 9:7, Matthew 10:14, Acts 8:26, 2 Peter 2:20, Acts 13:45, John 4:35, Proverbs 23:9, 1 Peter 3:15

Topics: "Discernment in Evangelism", "Effective Witnessing"

Description

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Transcript

How to understand Matthew 7-6. Now that's a, see that's the kind of question that's hard to answer because it's asked in such a way that it doesn't really help me know what it is about this passage that people don't understand. And it says, don't give dogs what is holy and do not throw your pearls before pigs lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you.

So I hope everybody recognizes that we have allegory here. Obviously, the Lord is not talking about physical dogs. He's not talking about actual pigs.

He's talking about people. We, I mean, there's actually some Proverbs that resonate with a similar tone. I mean, you've got a proverb that says, you know, don't reprove a scoffer.

Don't speak in the hearing of a fool. I mean, some of the Proverbs say things like that. Don't do that.

Don't speak something that's good or valuable or helpful or wise to a scoffer or to a fool because they won't respond in a good way with it. In other words, you're wasting your time. All you're doing is giving them ammunition.

That's really what's happening here is don't give dogs what's holy. Don't throw your pearls before pigs. Why? Well, they trample them and they turn to attack you.

So what is it that's holy? What is it that is a pearl? Well, these are precious things. This would be like truth. This would be like things like scripture, like proclaiming the gospel, like sharing some kind of biblical teaching with a certain individual.

Now, let's just think with me. Do you know what a verse like this tells me? It tells me that the Lord is assuming you and I ought to be able to figure out who dogs and pigs are. Now, how do you recognize a dog and a pig? Probably, you recognize a dog and a pig because they trample holy things and pearls underfoot and turn and attack you.

I mean, you probably recognize who they are because they do the very thing that Jesus says that they'll do. And it's probably more like, hey, if you see that somebody does that, well, stop throwing the holy thing before them, or the outcome just isn't going to be good. So let's see this maybe more in some kind of practical way or practical sense as it's demonstrated in various places in scripture.

One of the things that I think we need to learn from a text like this, sometimes we have this idea that we need to evangelize everybody and that we need to keep evangelizing everybody, and that that is the most loving thing that we could do. And I've seen Christians who continue talking to people who don't want to hear. They've got this glazed over look in their eyes, or they keep looking at their watch, or it's evident that they just aren't interested, or you're talking to somebody you're sitting next to on a plane or on a bus or whatever, and you just tell by body language, you can tell that people are not interested.

You go to somebody's door, I've done that, they're not interested, or you meet people in a crowd, they're not interested. Sometimes I've watched Christians who just keep going on and on. I really think that texts like this and similar texts give us indication that don't do that.

Don't keep going on and on. And I'm going to show you a few, well, let's look at the verses. If you look over at Matthew chapter 10, you'll remember that Jesus sends out his 12.

He says in Matthew 12, 12, you enter a house, greet it. If the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it. If it's not worthy, let your peace return to you.

If anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town. You recognize what he's saying? You go up to a house, they're not willing to receive you. Don't sit there and keep arguing with them.

Don't go on and on and on. Don't continue forever and always. Shake the dust off your feet and move on.

And he says, I'll tell you, it'll be more bearable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than that for that town. And if you go down further to verse 23, here he says, and look, if you begin to preach the gospel and they persecute you, he doesn't say you need to just hang around there and just take that and continue to try to preach the gospel to your persecutors. He says this, flee to the next town.

Truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes. But the point I'm trying to make right there is, he doesn't say that you need to stay there. Go on, flee to the next.

Or when you go to the book of Acts and we actually see those early Christians as they took the gospel forth to the nations, you may remember the apostle Paul. You remember how he responded at times. If you go to Acts chapter 13, we know that Acts 13 is the first chapter where Barnabas and Saul were launched forth from Antioch.

This is their first missionary journey. This is where the missionary endeavor to the Gentiles was really launched forth in a very obvious and clear fashion. When you get down to about, well, maybe verse 45, when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul reviling them.

Well, you remember what pigs do? Pigs and dogs, that's basically what they do. They revile you. They trample it underfoot.

They turn and they attack you. That's what's happening here. So what do we say to Paul and Barnabas? Should you guys just stay there? Should you just keep throwing the holy things, throw the gospel, throw the pearls before these people? Is that what you ought to do? Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly.

It was necessary the word of God be spoken first to you. But since you thrust aside, since you're acting like these dogs and pigs that Jesus talked about, you judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, guess what we're doing? We're going. We're leaving.

We're turning to the Gentiles. I mean, this is the reality of this worked out. Um, well, I think of another text that talks about pigs.

Peter, Peter talks about pigs. If we go to second Peter chapter two, you may remember towards the end of this chapter. It says in second Peter chapter two, verse 20.

If after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, they're again entangled in them and overcome. The last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment.

And what's interesting is this. Here you have holy. That came from Matthew seven.

Don't take what's holy and give it to dogs. Here's something that's holy. The holy commandment delivered to them.

What the true proverb says has happened to them. The dog returns to its own vomit. The sow.

There's our dog and our pig right there. They returned to wallow in the mire. You know, if we're looking for people who are dogs and pigs, a lot of times it's not just people that take what's holy and they mock us or they revile us or they turn and they attack us or they persecute us.

The scripture also seems to indicate that you want to find dogs and pigs, it's people that have been exposed to the holy commandment. They've been exposed to the truth and they've turned. They're in such a position that it would have been better if they had never known than once knowing to actually turn and go back.

If you want to look around our world, for people who it seems probably fit this category as much as anybody. It's been people who have been in the church and have known the truth and have walked away.

Anyway, anything else anybody wants to say or comment on that? Well, here, brethren, I want to read something to you.

This book was recommended by Jeffrey Thomas. When he came over here about two years ago, two or three years ago, he, you know, we have this really decked out book table typically at our fellowship conference. Charles and Mona typically were behind all those books.

Oftentimes, Charles and Mac would give these, you know, book recommendations. Well, one year they had Jeffrey Thomas do it. And I usually don't attend those, but because Jeffrey did, I felt like that might be a little bit different and unique.

I pretty well knew from the lighters what books they most highly recommended, but I really didn't know that from Jeffrey. And he recommended this book called Get Real. And it's by this guy, Leonard, John Leonard.

This is a professor from Westminster. This is about sharing our faith. This is a book on evangelism.

And Jeffrey said he felt, I believe he said, he felt like this was one of the best books or if not the best book he had ever read, or at least he was recommending it on the subject of evangelism. So I thought, oh, that's interesting. If he recommends that, then you know what? I'm interested.

And I believe this is the best book I have ever read on evangelism. And I just, I want to give you a taste. He says things like this.

Jesus commanded us to preach the gospel to all nations. But that teaching must be tempered with Jesus teaching that we should not witness to everyone. He says, don't give dogs what's holy.

Don't throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you. Yet, we do tend to believe that because Jesus commanded us to preach the gospel, we have to speak to everyone and to keep talking until they believe. We do tend to think that way, but that's not what Jesus would have us to believe.

And that's what he's saying here. He said, he says this, we should learn from the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Mormons. Because when you tell them you're busy and can't speak to them, most of them politely say, thank you.

We're sorry to bother you. He says, again, he quotes from Matthew 10, 14, where I already quoted to you, shake the dust off your feet, leave the house or that town. He said, instead of trying to lead people to Christ, he believes that we need to give ourselves more to letting Christ lead people to us.

Now, you have to hear him. He doesn't say sit in your churches and never take the gospel out. He says, you ought to really be praying that God will bring you as you go out to take the gospel, that Christ will bring people to you who are truly interested.

You know, there are people out there who are under conviction. There are people out there who God is putting his finger on and they're troubled about their sins. They may be Muslim.

They may be Mormon. They may be JWs. They may be Hindus.

They may be Buddhists. They may be atheists. But the reality is there are people that the spirit of, remember what happens, the spirit of God comes into this world and he convicts.

There are people under conviction. He convicts of right judgment and righteousness. He convicts people of sin.

Listen to this. I learned this lesson while working with Muslims in France. Many Muslims wanted to talk about Christianity and Islam, but it wasn't because they were interested in the gospel.

They were interested in disproving Christianity and converting me. Too often these conversations were just arguments about what Muslims believe and what Christians believe. You ever been in that? You ever just had the argument? That happens all the time.

He says, all my convincing arguments never led one Muslim to Christ. But he said this, I noticed that there were Muslims who were coming to faith. And he says these Muslims for many reasons, they wanted to know about Christianity because they were interested in the gospel.

He says, yes, you had to answer the same questions that you debated the others about, but their attitude was completely different. They were looking to learn, whereas the others, they just wanted to argue. We have to be discerning.

I have seen young Christians stand and argue at somebody's door for an hour. I have seen young Christians argue with Jehovah's Witnesses for two or three hours when they're out evangelizing. And at the end, they didn't evangelize anybody that wanted to hear because they sat there and they argued with the JWs for the whole time.

He says this, my friend who's an expert fly fisherman, he compares witnessing to fly fishing for trout. Any of you ever fly fish or do you know what it is? He says when you're waiting and you see a trout, you want to present the fly in as natural a way as possible. If the trout doesn't take the bait, you might try again.

But if you just keep thrashing the water with your fly, if the trout doesn't bite it, you're not going to catch the trout. He says, leave that fish. Find another one that might be interested.

You can always come back later and maybe then you'll find a hungry trout. He says most of the people Jesus taught actually found Him. How do people find you? Well, ask your heavenly Father to send them and keep your eyes out for everyone who comes along as the possible answer to your prayers.

Our Lord still leads us the same way that He led Philip to the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8. Anyway, He goes on and He develops this. He says, I had an aisle seat on an airplane. When I got to my seat, there were two ladies in the seats next to me.

I sat down, I greeted them. The lady next to me introduced herself and her seat partner. After I introduced myself, the woman asked me what I did.

I told her I was a pastor. She was shocked and said, you're not going to believe this. But the woman next to me and I are having a conversation about Christianity since we checked in.

I just told her that if a pastor sits down beside us, then I know the Lord is trying to tell me something. He says, we spent the rest of the flight talking about reading through Scripture together. By letting everyone know that you're a believer, people will either automatically withdraw from you or be drawn to you.

Letting Christ bring people to you means never saying more than people want to hear. Now, this is really important. Just listen.

I think this is excellent. There are many times I've begun to share my faith with someone and discovered not long into the conversation that the person isn't interested. Why do we feel like if we keep talking, we can change their minds? It's God that changes hearts, not my words.

God may use my words, but if people are not interested in what I have to say, He says, stop talking. This is key. The Gospel is a precious gift and should only be given to those who deeply desire it.

You see, that's where our pearl and our holy things come in. Don't just cast it before any pig or any dog. That's strong language, but it's not mine.

It's the Lord's language. He calls people pigs and dogs. Again, the way we often discover those who deeply desire the Gospel and for that matter, how they find us, it's often through prayer.

And I would say this, we need to go out. We need to go into our workplaces. We need to go up and down our streets.

We need to go along the canal. We need to go to all the places. But you know, we always need to be basking it all in much prayer.

Through prayer, God prepares both us and those with whom we share Christ for the right encounter at the right time. I learned this lesson during my first term in France. He goes on, but he said, I called our home church and told them we would be there in August.

They asked me to preach while the pastor was away. First two Sundays of the month. First Sunday went really well.

It was wonderful to see our friends. Close friend Valerie came up and said to me and my wife, John, if you stay and be our pastor, we'll bring the Muslims to you. I laughed to myself thinking she has no idea how difficult reaching Muslims is.

It's naive to think they're so easy to convert. The next Sunday was a special day. I conducted a baptism and then we were invited to eat lunch with the family.

Long line of people formed after church waiting to speak to us. After many hugs and goodbyes, when there were only a few people left in line, one of the elders came up beside me and asked if he could speak to me for a moment. He had a concerned look.

After excusing myself, I stepped aside to talk to him. Johnny said there's a Latino man in the parking lot who says he has something to confess and would like to speak to the father. I've had that kind of thing happen.

Catholics come in the church. I've been called father before. I've been called different things, but this happens.

He says I told him we're not a Catholic church and they could speak to me and I would be glad to hear what he had to say, but he insisted he was to speak to the father. I sighed and asked, did he give you any indication what he has to confess? You know, this is our last day here and we leave for France tomorrow.

The family whose son we just baptized has asked us over for a special lunch and they're waiting for us.

Can't you speak to him? I tried to get him to speak with me. The other guy says, but he insisted on speaking with the father. What does he want? What if he's murdered somebody? What should I do? What if he's a drug dealer? After all, this is Dade County, Florida.

Who knows what this guy has to confess. I really don't know how I can be of any help to him leaving tomorrow for France. I was looking for any reason to get out of what seemed like an unpleasant situation.

The other guy says he's waiting in the parking lot. What should I tell him? The elder asked. It's not often people show up at church with something to confess.

So I thought I should at least take the time to meet our Latino confessor and see what he had to say. I looked over at my wife. She'd already decided what I should do and said, I'll take the kids over to lunch.

You get there when you can. I kissed her on the cheek, thanked her and said, this shouldn't take long. Sure, she said.

I'll see you when I see you. Be careful. The parking lot was on the other side of the church building.

I walked through the hallway and out into the parking lot where the elder said that the Latino man was waiting. He was easy to find because the parking lot was empty. He was parked at the far end in the last parking space.

His old white Toyota was still running. I wondered if this was a drive-by shooting with a man who had some type of vendetta against priests. The Domino's pizza sign in the back seat made the whole thing seem even stranger.

When he saw me coming across the lot, he got out of his car, stood beside it. He was medium height, slim with dark curly hair, wearing a white t-shirt, blue jeans, sneakers. His tan complexion Latino look was common in South Florida.

When I got within a few yards of him, I reached out my hand, said, hi, I'm the pastor of the church. How can I help you? The young man stepped toward me to shake my hand. My name is Farid, he said with an Arabic accent.

I'm a Palestinian from Bethlehem. I'm here today because I want to confess Jesus is my Lord and I want to become a Christian. Anyway, you get the sense.

And I think there's so much to it. Brethren, don't tell people more than they want to hear. It's better if you go to somebody's door and they begin to seem impatient or they're looking over their shoulder like they got food on the stove.

For you to simply say, I can see you're not interested in the words of eternal life today. I think I'll go to your neighbors. It's better to leave them like, hey, I want more.

Then you talk so much that when you finally leave, they're like, man, I'm glad to get rid of that guy. See, if you go away making them think you had something really important to offer them and they didn't want it. And you didn't stay there longer than they wanted you to.

Brethren, I think that there's a lot of wisdom in what he's got to say here. Because we're offering people the greatest thing upon the face of the earth. We're offering them redemption.

We're offering them the pearl of great price. And you know what? If they want to treat it with contempt, they want to treat it like it's nothing. I mean, sometimes I'm amazed you come with such a gifted system.

People, they don't want anything to do with it. And yet I have found what he says is true. I've found other people.

I've come to some people's doors and I have said, ma'am, I'm here from Grace Community Church throughout your neighborhood today and we are sharing the gospel. We're talking to people about life and death and Christ and God and sin and hell. Ma'am, do you ever think about death? I mean, there are doors where the lady will be like, I think about it all the time.

Well, you know what? Bang, you got an open door. You're probably going to be able to talk for 40 minutes. There's other places and you can just tell.

It's like they have no interest. I'll still try to force a track in the door because I don't know what God might do with it. Somebody, their children, somebody else in the family, who knows, it may go in a drawer and their grandkids may pull it out 26 years later and look at it and there's the truth and bang, God's word is not bound.

You never know what may happen. I always try to get a track to them and to at least leave that there. But brethren, I would say this, don't go on longer with people than they want to.

Don't cast pearls before a swine. I think his approach is great. He's got a lot more to say about it.

And really, if you're interested, and it's a small book. I don't imagine it costs very much. And if you have a burden for souls, but brethren, I would say this, I have found this to be so true.

My wife and I have both found this to be true. If we asked, Lord, bring somebody to us to talk to us about the gospel, it's amazing. The Lord will open that door for you.

And that doesn't mean we shouldn't be proactive. Obviously going, go and make disciples. We have to be active.

We can't just be passive. We have to go. But you know what, as we're going, if we're asking, Lord, send us.

Take us to the place we need to go. Help us to hear the Macedonian call. Help us to know where the Ethiopian eunuch is.

Lord, lead us and guide us. Take us. We're ready to be used by You.

We want to be used by You. We don't want to spend our days and nights casting pearl before swine. Obviously, You told us not to do that.

That's obviously a waste of time. Lord, show us where the Lydia's are. Those that you're getting ahold of the heart.

Show us where the Spirit of God is at work. As much as anything, we need to be praying if we're going to seek to be evangelists. Can I give an example as well, Tim? Can you hear me okay? Yep.

Yeah. I heard Paul Washer saying once when he was on an aeroplane and he was sat next to a guy and he had spent half an hour talking with him, just having a great chat about different things and his family and really connecting with this guy. And then Paul brought something up of the gospel and then this guy just went a bit ballistic on him and said, I don't want to hear what's all this about.

I don't want to hear any of this. And so Paul just dropped it and then went straight back into just talking about so you're saying about your son and the baseball team or something and then he just carried on and enjoyed the rest of the flight. And then as they were getting off, the guy got in the aisle and then he just turned to Paul and said, I think he put out his hand and he said, sorry, I got a head up on you there earlier on.

And I think he was just sort of giving the example that if he'd have carried on talking, he would have just wound the guy up real big and instead the guy ended up apologizing and probably thought the better of Paul and his religion sort of thing. Gave him more to think about in the end. I had a similar thing happen on an airplane where I think the guy felt so bad in the end, he was trying to give me money.

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