

The Canaanite Woman and the Sarcasm of Jesus

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Abstract:

The story of the Canaanite woman who comes to Jesus for the healing of her daughter. This is the only time in the gospel corpus where Jesus is rude or harsh to a needy person coming to Him for help. After acknowledging three main readings of this pericope in Matthew's account, this paper takes a close look at the text offering a new reading: Jesus is using sarcasm to challenge the poor attitude of His disciples. This reading is consistent with the meta-narrative of the entire gospel corpus with respect to how Jesus treated the poor and needy, whether Jew or Gentile.

Keywords:

Canaanite Woman, Matthean community, Sarcasm of Jesus

The puzzling account of the woman coming to Jesus in *Matthew* 15 has attracted attention from Christian writers since the third century.¹ While there are many ways to exegete this pericope, the intention here is to offer a new and fairly simple way to read this account that is both faithful to the text and allows the puzzling comments of Jesus to make sense.

¹ See Klancher, N., *The Taming of the Canaanite Woman*, 1st Ed (De Gruyter 2013). Klancher discusses how early church writers viewed this story: Tertullian, Origen, Chrysostom and others.

After a basic outline of the text freely using both *Mark* and *Matthew*, we will briefly look at the three prevailing readings of the text.² Next, we will go through the critical redactions in *Matthew*, pressing some aspects of the story that lead to a fresh reading. The remainder of the article will present several aspects of the proposed reading with supporting evidence from the text and secondary studies.

First, the basic story as gleaned from the accounts in both *Matthew* and *Mark*.³ Jesus has traveled to the region of Tyre and Sidon. He apparently wants some privacy, probably to rest, eat and relax (Mark 7:24; Matt 15:21). A Gentile woman approaches Jesus to get help for her daughter. Jesus makes

There is a section with an interesting slant on *Pseudo-Clementine*. See especially the section titled “RapiturChristus: Becoming Christians,” 44.

² See Jackson, G., *Have Mercy on Me*. 1st Ed. (Sheffield Academic Press 2002) for a fairly exhaustive listing of studies on this pericope. To mention a few of the topics covered: the Matthean community and their need for guidelines to accept Gentiles; whether the woman was depicted as a sojourner (*Matthew*) or an enemy (*Mark*); parallels with the story of Ruth; “a feminist critique,” and many other angles on this text. See also, Hartman, Tracy Kemp, “Jesus, What Were You Thinking? The Canaanite Woman in Matthew 15:21-28,” Chap.6, 75-91 in *Letting the Other Speak: Proclaiming the Stories of Biblical Women* (Lexington Books 2012). Richard Bauckham sees this as “a new Rahab encountering a Messiah who could be a new Joshua,” Bauckham, Richard, *Gospel Women: Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels* (Eerdmans 2002) 44.

³ Mark 7:24-30; Matt 15:21-28 [all citations are from the RSV]. As reflected in the title of this study, the woman in question will mostly be referred to as “the Canaanite woman” following the text in *Matthew*.

the famous statement, “*It is not fair to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.*” (Mark 7:27; Matt 15:26) The woman responds to Jesus, “*Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.*” (Mark 7:28; Matt 15:27) When Jesus hears her response He praises the woman and says that her daughter has been healed. (Mark 7:29; Matt 15:28)

In the first common reading some scholars have suggested this story reveals a misogynistic thread either in Jesus or in *Matthew*.⁴ This reading seems to fail for obvious reasons. There are too many examples of Jesus showing compassion to women and Gentiles, making this story an anomaly to be explained, rather than revealing a flaw in Jesus.⁵ Feminist scholars who

⁴ Klancher, a section titled “Race, Class, and Gender,” 112. There are many points of disagreement among the scholarly studies. John Nolland says Jackson “maintains that Matthew’s account is informed by traditions about Gentile women becoming converts to Judaism...Though there are some similarities, the case is not strong...” Nolland, John. *The New International Greek Testament Commentary: Gospel of Matthew* (UK Eerdmans 2005) 636n217. Nolland also comments on the structure of the pericope, “The view that the episode is a layered history of debates in the early church...founders on the failure of the account to resolve such issues...,” 631. Nolland argues that the Canaanite woman (who “is not being treated with dignity,” 635) somehow convinces Jesus to change His mind about helping her.

⁵ See Ricci, Carla, *Mary Magdalene and Many Others: Women who followed Jesus* (Fortress Press 1994) for an excellent study of the women in the orbit of Jesus. See Ricci’s chart of the encounters of Jesus with women, 62-3. The overarching testimony of the gospel material is that Jesus cared for women, Gentiles and everyone who came to Him in need. This was obvious to the early writers: according to Chrysostom, Jesus would not turn Gentiles away: “to turn them away in their need would have been unworthy of his love of humanity,” [Hom. Matt. 52.1] cited by Klancher, 96.

lean towards this position reflect a strong view of the humanity of Christ. Some of these scholars are quick to read this encounter through the lens of a male/female confrontation. Tracy Hartman writes, “After she got the best of Jesus in a sharp verbal exchange...” Jesus gives the “Great is your faith” comment.⁶ In her “Abstract” Ann Edwards, speaking of the Canaanite woman, lays the foundation for this reading,

Rather than waiting for Jesus...or asking politely, she demands to take action...feminist scholars fixate on the women’s bold actions and motivations.⁷

After reading around 25 studies on this text, this is the only scholar to describe this woman as “demanding.” A bit further down in her paper Edwards continued,

Feminist scholars are more willing to hold that Jesus’s mind is changed...while traditional scholars are more hesitant to express this

⁶ Hartman, 75.

⁷ Edwards, Anne Katherine, “Who’s in Charge Here? How Traditional and Feminist Scholars Explain the Story of Jesus and the Canaanite/Syrophoenician Woman,” *UCLA Journal of Religion*, No.5 (2021) 62-77. Edwards cites several feminist scholars in her work. Two stood out to this author: Gench, Frances Taylor, *Back to the Well: Women’s Encounters with Jesus in the Gospels* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press 2004) and Ringe, Sharon, “A Gentile Woman’s Story.” *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, edited by Letty M Russell, 65-72. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985).

change because they believe that Jesus's deity would imply that he...cannot change his mind.⁸

Most scholars acknowledge this story to be “problematic,” “humiliating,” or “the only” time this happens, yet rather than grounding this text within the wider gospel material, those who subscribe to this first reading use this “bizarre” account to make statements about the human flaws in Jesus. If this is the *only* time Jesus speaks rudely to a needy person, perhaps we should pursue other options before we settle on this first reading.

The reading presented in this study does not make any excuses. There were human flaws. The feminist scholars still have the male disciples to blame. This writer agrees with Edward's summary of the feminist scholars who “fixate on the women's bold actions;” in addition, this writer would add a fixation on the flaws of Jesus. Almost all scholars admit this story to be an anomaly. The reading presented here will remove it from that status.

This study does not change the boldness of the woman. It does not minimize her willingness to break cultural norms; if she had seen or heard Jesus just once or twice she would know that He is not afraid of breaking cultural norms. This study does not remove the positive proclamation of this woman from the mouth of Jesus. The feminist studies present many

⁸ Edwards, 66.

interesting angles, however like the other readings, these fall short of offering credible evidence to explain the “harsh” comments of Jesus. This study takes this encounter out of the category of “abnormal” on the part of Jesus.⁹

The meta-narrative of the gospel material does not reveal a Jew/Gentile conflict in Jesus, but what about problems with the author of *Matthew* or the disciples? That must be considered.¹⁰ In addition to this story, there are more examples of the disciples exhibiting *bad* behavior towards women, children, and/or Gentiles that cannot be dismissed.¹¹

⁹ Ibid., 65.

¹⁰ There are examples of Matthew showing a cultural bias against women and Gentiles. Twice Matthew uses χωρίς (“without”) when counting how many people were fed by Jesus, 14:21 and 15:38 while both Mark (6:44; 8:19) and Luke (9:14) simply say “men.” These texts show a “patriarchal and androcentric language-structure” [in Matthew] that reveals an “absence of women and a silence applied, generally if not completely, to them.” Ricci, 20. Also, see Gullotta, Daniel N. “Among Dogs and Disciples: An Examination of the Story of the Canaanite Woman (Matthew 15:21-28) and the Question of the Gentile Mission within the Matthean Community,” *Neotestamentica*, Vol. 48, No. 2 (2014). Gullotta shows how Matt 6:31-32 refers to Gentiles (ἔθνη) while Luke 6:32-33 replaces “ ‘Gentiles’ [ἔθνη] with the more general ‘sinners’ [ἁμαρτωλοὶ],” 327. The use of “the nations” (ἔθνη) in the quotation from Isaiah in Matt 12:18-21 makes it seem like the “large crowd” contained Gentiles; when Jesus saw the “large crowd he had compassion on them and healed their sick,” (Matt 14:14, 36 and 15:30 where Jesus says “I have compassion for these people”).

¹¹ *John* 4:27; *Luke* 9:46-48; *Luke* 9:54-55 - Jesus scolded James and John for wanting to call down fire on the Samaritans. Three times in *Matthew* the disciples urge Jesus to send people

A second reading of this story is that Jesus is testing the woman. This reading holds that Jesus does not *really* insult her, and is allowing her good character and attitudes to come into focus. This reading sees the comments of Jesus as playful or strategic and thus not rude.¹² Gench says this explanation is common and adds sarcastically that Jesus probably had “a twinkle in his eye!” She rejects this reading stating that this would make Jesus a hypocrite, followed with, “one is hard-pressed to find the ‘testing’ theory persuasive.” In this context Gench cites Frederick Bruner as another scholar who rejects this reading.¹³ Bruner sees this encounter as a turning

away rather than help them: *Matt* 14:15; 15:23 and 19:13. In *Luke* 18:39 - “Those who led the way” and rebuked the blind beggar could easily be disciples.

¹² See Gundry, Robert, *Matthew, A Commentary on His Handbook on a Mixed Church Under Persecution*, 2nd ed. (Eerdmans 1994). Gundry is somewhat difficult to put into one of these three readings, but he certainly thinks “Jesus is working His way around restrictions in order to ‘heighten her faith’,” 313. Jackson lists more than a few scholars that offer excuses Jesus for his rudeness: “All of these explanations are the result of wishful-thinking: the points of apparent rudeness do not disappear...” 53n82. Ben Witherington calls the “dog” comment harsh: “Regardless of whether one thinks the term ‘kuvapiov’ is a diminutive or not, the use of the term is likely an insult or slur, especially when spoken by a Jew to a Gentile,” Witherington, Ben, *Women in the Ministry of Jesus: A Study of Jesus’ Attitudes to Women and Their Roles as Reflected in His Earthly Life* (Cambridge 1987), 232. Craig Keener affirms the view that Jesus used a diminutive for the woman, but “the children’s pet dogs...however, hardly transforms the image into a compliment...” See, Keener, Craig S.. *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (United Kingdom: Eerdmans Publishing Company 2009), 416.

¹³ Gench, 21-22. Gench cites Bruner, Frederick Dale. *Matthew: A Commentary*, Vol 2 (UK: Eerdmans 2007), 552. See Bruner's comments on this text, 97-106.

point for Jesus - the beginning of His outreach to Gentiles, and he does mention that Jesus could be “testing” the woman, but then quickly adds, “To attribute such testing to Jesus would make him the hypocrite he so often excoriates.”¹⁴ Bruner does say that Jesus is giving the woman time to realize that “he has not listened to his disciples,” has not sent her away and thus has given her hope.¹⁵ Jackson offers similar criticism for the reading that Jesus is “testing” the woman:

The troublesome words in v.26 about the children’s bread have been softened or explained away by scholars, but not convincingly...Jesus’ apparent rebuke of the woman has been trivialized by claims that irony and humor are used by the author of Matthew in this text merely for rhetorical effect.¹⁶

Finally, Amy-Jill Levine is not convinced that Jesus was teasing the woman, Still others suggested that he was teasing, or that he made his

¹⁴ Bruner, 100.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Jackson, 1.

comment with a smile on his lips and a twinkle in his eye. Oh, please.

I find Jesus's comments problematic at best.¹⁷

The reading of this text as Jesus "testing" the faith of the woman fails to adequately explain the comments of Jesus.

There is a third reading that seems to have more promise: Jesus is working around the first-century Jewish cultural interpretations of the Law.¹⁸ Duncan Derrett presents an elaborate view of Jesus skillfully maneuvering around the Law in order to "legally" give this Gentile woman His attention, ultimately to heal her daughter. Derrett subscribes to the Jewish-Christian "Matthean community" position:

Matthew...is writing for a community beginning to be out of touch with oral tradition: clues have to be written out in full.¹⁹

¹⁷ Levine, A.J., *The Difficult Words of Jesus* (Canterbury Press 2022). I could only access this book on Google Books and on www.perlego.com. Neither had page numbers.

¹⁸ J. Duncan M. Derrett, "Law in the New Testament: The Syro-Phoenician Woman and the Centurion of Capernaum," *Novum Testamentum*, Vol. 15, Fasc. 3 (July, 1973), 161-86. Also see, See Gullotta, 325-40.

¹⁹ Derrett, 162. Jackson makes it clear in her Introduction that she holds the Matthean community reading of the text: "...it is a story that reflects tension between Jews and proselytes in Matthew's community and responds to the question, 'What must one do to become a member of the community?'" Jackson believes the message to the community is that the Canaanite woman "must become a Jew in a Jewish community," 1. Keener appears to share this view: "Matthew increases the racially polarized tone in Mark, whether because his community knows a stricter tradition that Mark has toned down, or perhaps to appeal to hard-liners in his community with a

There appears to be evidence in *Matthew* for this position.²⁰ This third reading presents a Jewish-Christian audience that embraces the *Matthean* gospel and would likely also contain certain aspects of prejudice towards women and Gentiles. Derrett brings out many interesting points about a first-century Jewish perspective on the Law and how Jesus may have worked around this perspective in order to reach Gentiles. While the pericope of this study might support a “Matthean community,” like the other readings, the Jewish-Christian community does not satisfactorily explain the apparent rudeness of Jesus.

Amy-Jill Levine’s work on this pericope is thorough.²¹ However, in her comments on “The Broader Narrative Context” Levine opines on the various ways that scholars view the purpose of this pericope. She clearly states the

hard-line Judaic Jesus who finally allows himself to be won over by the woman’s persistent faith,” Keener, 415. Richard Bauckham presents an argument against ALL assumptions of separate communities, see *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* (UK: Eerdmans 1998), 9-40.

²⁰ Jackson, 34n24; those who view Matthew as “pro-Gentile” include Sim, David C., “The Gospel of Matthew and the Gentiles,” *JSNT* 51 (1995), 19-48. Michael Cook questions the Jewish author theory of Matthew based on what he sees as an anti-Jewish slant. See Cook, Michael J., “Interpreting ‘Pro-Jewish’ Passages in Matthew,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 54 (1983), 135–46. Cook questions the four main pro-Jewish texts and offers a convincing contextual angle on those texts that may suggest a non-Jewish redactor of the gospel, 142.

²¹ Amy Jill-Levine, *The Social and Ethnic Dimensions of Matthean Salvation History*, *STUDIES IN THE BIBLE AND EARLY CHRISTIANITY*, Vol 14 (The Edwin Mellen Press 1988).

thoughts that had been running through my mind while reading her work:

While almost all of the conclusions reached are plausible, some are mutually exclusive and none is verifiable. The chaotic state of scholarship is one indication of the drawbacks of this approach. (153)

Levine's thoughts on whether the intended audience is Jewish, Gentile or converted Gentiles into a more Jewish-centric Christian fellowship,

It becomes unclear which material is relevant to the readers, and which concerns some other group. (154)

One considerable problem with all of these readings is the "big picture" of Jesus' attitude towards women and Gentiles. This story stands out *because* it is an anomaly. The overarching testimony of the gospel material is that Jesus *was compassionate* to women and Gentiles.²² Like Levine, several scholars point out the internal tension (or contradiction) of these theories. Derrett's presentation is thought-provoking and interesting, but does not overcome the meta-narrative of the gospel material: Jesus came to reach Jew and Gentile. This story is jarring and has received so much

²² Jackson, *Have Mercy*, 33n18. Also, the comments of Jesus in Matt 11 where the towns of Tyre and Sidon will fare better in judgment than the towns of Israel; again in Matt 12 Nineveh will fare better. Other gospel texts carry this same message: Luke 4:24-27, Luke 11:29-32; the woman with the jar of perfume, John 12:4-7. See Ricci's graph, 62-3.

attention over the centuries *because* it appears that Jesus is being rude and dismissive to a woman in desperate need. As has already been stated, this is *the only* example of Jesus being rude and dismissive to a person who comes to Him in need.²³ All the views above seek to accuse, explain, or make excuses for the rudeness of Jesus whether it was Jesus speaking or the writer of *Matthew* putting words in His mouth.

Sarcasm as a Teaching Tool and the Intended Audience

There is a fairly simple solution that does not accuse or excuse Jesus or the gospel author. It does not negate many of the underlying positions held by the scholarship already mentioned. Also, this reading is supported by, and does no harm to the text. The “rude” comments of Jesus were *not* directed at the woman; Jesus used sarcasm directed at the disciples for correction.

First, look at the pointers in the texts. In *Mark* the “children’s bread” comment of Jesus is clearly directed at the woman, yet *Matthew* does not follow *Mark* in this detail. In *Mark* Jesus specifically speaks “to her” [αὐτῆ] twice, in v27 and v29. In *Mark* both “the dogs” comment and “For such a reply” comment have the feminine pronoun. In *Matthew* the only time the

²³ John Meier: “nowhere else in the Gospel tradition does Jesus address a sincere petitioner with such harsh, insulting language,” Meier, John, *The Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, Vol. 2, Mentor, Message and Miracles, The Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 660.

text specifically says Jesus spoke *to the woman* using the feminine pronoun is in v28:

*Then Jesus said to her [ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν αὐτῇ], “Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.”*²⁴

Matthew has six significant additions/redactions to the story. First, *Matthew* refers to the woman as a “Canaanite” while *Mark* refers to her as a “SyroPhoenician” woman.²⁵ The second addition in *Matthew* is the woman “crying out...have mercy on me,” calling out to Jesus for help. The third addition immediately follows; *Matthew* adds “*Jesus did not answer a word,*” (v23) apparently trying to ignore her. The fourth addition (also in v23): the disciples urge Jesus to “*send her away.*” In response (the fifth significant addition) *Matthew* has Jesus utter the exclusive logion in v24: “*I was sent*

²⁴ In *Matthew* Jesus speaks to a crowd, a group or to individuals 132 times [51% of the time there is a clarifying pronoun; 49% have no clarifying pronoun]. Of the 65 occurrences with no pronoun, this text with the Canaanite woman stands out - Jesus is speaking and the context does not fully make the audience clear. Gench gives this assessment as well, 10. Gundry shows the subtle Greek terms used in Matt 15:24 “to indicate shifts in the dialogue...*Matthew* directs Jesus’ answer to the disciples, not to the woman (cf. his directing Jesus’ similar statement in 10:5b-6 to the disciples). Not till v 25 does the woman come close enough for Jesus to carry on a conversation with her,” 312.

²⁵ This appears to be a trend in *Matthew* - the author does seem to reveal some bias against women and Gentiles. See Gullotta, 329-30. I agree with Gullotta that “*Matthew*’s change [calling the woman a Canaanite] is intentional ...a strikingly different description of the woman in the two stories...emerges,” 329n8.

only to the lost sheep of Israel.”²⁶ At this crucial moment in *Matthew* the woman kneels before Jesus and simply says, “*Lord, help me.*” Then in v26, we get the sixth significant addition/redaction, an unusual statement of Jesus: *He replied, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.”*²⁷ In both accounts Jesus appears to refer to the woman as a “dog” [τοις κυναρίοις],²⁸ but there is no feminine pronoun [αὐτῆ] in the preface of either harsh/rude comment made by Jesus in *Matthew*.

The theory presented here is that the harsh/rude comments made by Jesus are *not* directed at the woman, but rather at the disciples. However, the missing feminine pronoun is *not* the only reason we can come to this

²⁶ Klancher refers to this “exclusivity logion” several times. This Matthean saying is unique to *Matthew* and only occurs twice: Matt 10:6 (the two-by-two commission), then again in 15:24. Cook offers a fairly strong argument against this logion being a legitimate Jesus saying, see 140-141. Gundry does not believe that this was a saying of Jesus, 313.

²⁷ Note: *Mark* has the feminine pronoun prior to the “dog” statement. Also, Jesus utters the “dog” comment after the woman kneels before Him in both accounts *Mark* 7:25; (the “dog” comment is in v27). The woman falls at the feet of Jesus in *Matthew* 15:25 (the “dog” comment is in v26).

²⁸ The use of the diminutive opens the door to excuse Jesus and/or *Matthew*. Gullotta follows many others, straining to explain the “inconsistent,” and “uncomfortable” actions and words of Jesus, 333. Levine is not buying it: “...to compare her to a dog does not seem to me consistent with the Jesus who heals Peter’s mother-in-law, touches a man with leprosy...stops the bleeding of a hemorrhaging woman...” *Difficult Words*, www.perlego.com, no page numbers (emphasis added).

conclusion. Now we will walk through the text to present how this could have happened.

Jesus is tired and possibly hungry. He wants some time away from the crowds. This is indicated in both accounts and is a common theme in the gospel material. Both accounts indicate that a Gentile woman in need is calling out to Jesus for help. In *Matthew* Jesus ignores the woman at first and the disciples appear agitated, telling Jesus to “*send her away.*” This is where a teaching moment begins.

Jesus is not happy with the attitude He perceives from His disciples. They should know by now that He is not only *willing*, but also *desires* to help when someone comes to Him. He did not typically push anyone away. Realizing that these events may not be in chronological order, this is the context for the pericope in question:

- *Matt 8:2* - the leper said, “Lord, if you are willing...” Jesus replied, “I am willing.”
- *Matt 8:5* - the Roman centurion came to Jesus who was quick to heal his servant.
- *Matt 8:16* - Jesus healed “all the sick” who came to Him.
- *Matt 8:32* - Jesus restored the demoniac men.
- *Matt 9:7* - Jesus healed the paralyzed man.
- *Matt 9:22* - Jesus healed the woman with the bleeding issue.
- *Matt 9:25* - Jesus then healed the daughter of the synagogue ruler.
- *Matt 9:30* - Jesus healed the two blind men.

- *Matt 9:33* - Jesus drove a demon from a mute man.
 - *Matt 9:35-37* - Jesus went through towns and villages “healing every disease...He had compassion on them.”
 - *Matt 12:13* - Jesus healed the man with a shriveled hand.
 - *Matt 12:22* - Jesus healed another demoniac.
 - *Matt 14:14* - Jesus had compassion on the crowd and healed them.
 - *Matt 14:15* - *the disciples wanted to send the crowd away*, (just as they wanted Jesus to send the woman away), but Jesus fed the crowd.
 - *Matt 14:35-36* - another crowd formed and He healed their sick.
- Now** in the flow of *Matthew's* account, the Canaanite woman approaches Jesus *and the disciples want to send her away!*

After all of these examples of Jesus ministering to those in need, His initial silence is not testing the woman, but rather He is testing the disciples to see what their response will be to the request of this needy woman (v23).²⁹ When the disciples tell Him to dismiss the woman and make her go away, they have failed the test and His response is pointed.³⁰ Jesus responds in a

²⁹ Witherington also sees the silence as a test of the attitude of the disciples and “their response is ambiguous,” 64. Maybe Jesus “knew their thoughts” (Matt.9:4 and 12:25). It did not require a miracle. Jesus was a keen reader of people, and had already witnessed this kind of behavior before.

³⁰ The disciples are again telling Jesus to send another person away. Robert Gundry also thinks Jesus is speaking to the disciples. Next, Jesus speaks the exclusivity logion, See Gundry,

comment without a pronoun attached. The text makes more sense if Jesus is addressing the last party that spoke - the disciples. This comment is not directed at the woman.³¹ Jesus turns His attention to the disciples and sarcastically questions them: “*I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel?*” (v24) There is no indication in the text that this statement was directed at the woman.³² She must have heard Jesus speaking to His disciples in a tone of voice that gave her hope. There are no markings in the MSS and no translation offers a question mark. However, a statement can become a rhetorical question with a certain tone of voice. This concept will be addressed below in the section on sarcasm, irony and humor.

It is at this point in the story that *Matthew* has the woman fall at His feet and simply say, “*Lord, help me.*” Jesus directs His next comment to the

Robert H., Commentary on Matthew (Baker Academic 2011), section: “A Gentile’s Understanding of Jesus as Lord and Son of David, Matthew 15:21-28.” Gundry, however, does read the rude “dog” comment as directed at the woman. Derrett also indicates that this comment may have been spoken to the disciples, but also heard by the women: “It is usually thought...that Jesus, disappointed in his own flock, was rude to her to test her faith (or allowed her to overhear a tart remark to his disciples!)” emphasis added, 162.

³¹ “Jesus’ second response in Matthew is directed primarily to the disciples and only secondarily (if at all) to the woman...” when He makes the exclusivity logion, only to the lost sheep of Israel, Witherington, 65.

³² The only evidence for this is in Mark’s version of the story. Gullotta seems to accept the majority reading and writes, “Addressing her directly, Jesus tells her...” 332. That is how most scholars have read this text. Maybe Matthew had a different oral tradition, or Matthew’s text is intentionally obscure.

disciples [there is no feminine pronoun], continuing the teaching moment. Once again, Jesus uses sarcasm framed in a rhetorical question: “*It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs?*” (v26) And again, the woman realizes that Jesus is not against her, but is defending her. She boldly answers the rhetorical question, knowing full well it was not directed at her: “*Yes it is, Lord,*” she said. “*Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table*” (v27). Now, for the first time in *Matthew’s* account Jesus clearly says “to her,” [ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν αὐτῇ] “*Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.*”³³

The Audience of Jesus

It is fairly clear that Jesus typically had three audiences: the disciples, the Pharisees, and the crowds, the common people seeking His miracles and teachings. In this story there are only two options: the disciples and the woman. This study has shown the difference between how *Mark* and *Matthew* have recorded the words of Jesus, how and to whom, the comments were directed. There is another interesting passage in *Matthew* that can be seen from the same angle, *Matt 17:14-21*. The similarities of this story with

³³ Interestingly the feminine pronoun is not needed because Jesus says “woman.” This is one of the data points where *Matthew* followed the text in *Mark*.

the Canaanite woman are striking. A man with a son who suffered from seizures approaches Jesus and says:

*I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not. You unbelieving and perverse generation,” Jesus replied, “how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy here to me.” Matt 17:17*³⁴

This story has very similar circumstances: someone comes to Jesus for help. The disciples are of no help. Jesus makes a rude/harsh comment. Initially there is no pronoun to establish who Jesus is addressing. But the context of the story *after* the healing clearly shows that the harsh comments were directed at the disciples rather than at the distressed father coming to Jesus for help, nor a general rebuke of the crowd. After making His harsh comments, Jesus quickly says “*Bring the boy to me,*” which indicates an immediate desire to heal the boy. Jesus is unhappy with His followers rather than being frustrated by a person in need of a miracle or a crowd wanting to see a miracle. After the man leaves, the disciples ask Jesus why they failed

³⁴ The same story with this *saying* appears in *Mark 9:19* and *Luke 9:41* and is almost identical, but with a plural pronoun in *Mark* and no pronoun in *Luke*.

and He replied, “*Because you have so little faith.*” (Matt 17:20) The disciples witnessed many miracles, yet were “*unbelieving.*”³⁵

Pseudo-Clementine Homily

In addition to the textual evidence of the missing feminine pronoun, and the similar passages where Jesus appears to rebuke the disciples, the fourth century *Pseudo-Clementine Homilies* offer a similar reading of the story being presented here:

And she came to our Lord, crying out, and entreating that He would heal her daughter. But He, being asked also by us, said, ‘It is not lawful to heal the Gentiles, who are like to dogs on account of their using various meats and practices, while the table in the kingdom has been given to the sons of Israel.’ But she, hearing this, and begging.. Ps.Clem.Hom. II.19

This text in the *Pseudo-Clementine Homilies* must be used with caution for many reasons, but it does appear that the writer is depicting the “dog” comment as spoken to the disciples...*But He, being asked also by us, said,* [the “dog” comment, then] *she, hearing this...* As with the text in *Matthew 15*, this text can be read as Jesus speaking these words to the disciples with

³⁵ There are six clear rebukes of the disciples as a group for lacking faith: *Matt 6:30; 8:26; 13:41; 15:16; 16:8; 17:20; 19:14; 26:10; Luke 8:25; 9:41; 12:28; Mark 4:40* (some of these are the same pericope).

the woman hearing Him and responding. It could be that the *Pseudo-Clementine* writer is attempting to bring clarity to the gospel story in question.

Sarcasm, Irony and Humor in the Biblical Text

This study presents the use of sarcasm by Jesus. There are several biblical texts where sarcasm is obvious.³⁶ Bart Ehrman brings out his favorite sarcastic NT verse, *Gal 5:12*: “*I wish those who unsettle you would be cut off.*” Next, Ehrman comments on the use of sarcasm by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount:

It’s interesting how most people don’t observe Jesus’ humor, but there seems to be a good bit of it...It is difficult to identify sarcasm...The way we typically detect sarcasm is by the context of the comment and the non-verbal signs given – the facial expression, for example, or the tone of voice used and the words orally

³⁶ These are just a sample: Job 12:2; 1 Kings 18:27; Matt 7:3; 12:1-3; Luke 13:33; 1 Cor 4:8-9. Also, Bart Ehrman, “Is There Sarcasm in the New Testament?” [<https://ehrmanblog.org/is-there-sarcasm-in-the-new-testament/>], August 5, 2018. Ehrman points to a study by Elton Trueblood, *The Humor of Christ: A Significant but Often Unrecognized Aspect of Christ’s Teaching* (Harper & Row 1964).

emphasized. You have none of that for the writings of the New Testament.³⁷

G.B. Caird makes a similar comment about the *Matt 15* text:

...one must be especially aware of the problem incurred by the loss of *tone* in any reported saying of Jesus. Anyone today who attempts to read the Bible in public knows what a change in meaning can be effected by changing the inflexions of the voice. Jesus' words, which in cold print seem so austere, were almost certainly spoken with a smile and a tone of voice which invited the woman's witty reply.³⁸

Caird is in the second reading group; he thinks Jesus is testing the woman.

However, it must be acknowledged that Jesus could, in fact, be making these "rude" comments to the disciples.³⁹

³⁷ Ehrman, "Is There Sarcasm...?" commenting on Matt 7:3.

³⁸ Caird also entertains the possibility that Jesus' facial expression and tone of voice may indeed help to explain this pericope. Caird is not assuming the use of sarcasm, but he does suggest that Jesus uses non-verbal cues in the Matt 15 text and that the woman heard and understood these cues, Caird, G.B., *New Testament Theology* (Clarendon Press 1994), 395.

³⁹ Bruner on the topic of Jesus uttering the exclusivity logion, "To whom is Jesus talking? The text does not tell us (there is no 'said to her' ...). It is almost as if Jesus is talking to himself," Bruner, 99 (emphasis by Bruner).

The Humor of Jesus

Elton Trueblood offered an excellent work on the humor of Jesus in which he stresses that without seeing and understanding the humor, irony and sarcasm of Jesus, we are likely to misunderstand many of His sayings. In Chapter 3 Trueblood comments on the use Jesus makes of irony and humor. Sometimes His sayings are “the kind of irony in which the intended implication is the exact opposite of the literal sense,” also “the dividing line which separates irony and sarcasm is sometimes a narrow one...Christ must have felt that the gravity of some problems required a sterner treatment.”⁴⁰ Trueblood could also be quite sharp with his own sarcasm of the leading scholars of his day. This comment is difficult to pass over given some of the commentary I have read for this study:

the amount of learned squirming...is phenomenal...There is one, and only one hypothesis that cuts through all this nonsense of interpretation, with its labored efforts - *the hypothesis that Jesus was joking*. And why not?...If we accept this hypothesis, the various perplexities are cleared up.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Trueblood, 62 and 64.

⁴¹ Ibid., 101.

Six times in *Matthew* Jesus begins a comment directed at the Pharisees with [οὐκ ἀνέγνωτε]⁴² “Have you not read...” This also appears to be sarcasm. The Pharisees were very happy with themselves on reading, studying and knowing the Law of Moses. Several texts indicate that Jesus liked to poke the Pharisees in the eye by beginning a response with “Have you not read...?” Of course the Pharisees had read whatever Jesus recited to them. It is the sarcasm that likely irks His debaters most: the peasant Galilean preacher is asking these highly studied leaders “*Have you even read this text?*”

In Chapter 6 Trueblood offers some thoughts on the key passage of this study:

Thoughtful readers are more likely to recognize the humor here than at any other point. This is because they can see that any alternative is intolerable.⁴³

Consistent with the thrust of this study, Trueblood states that “we do not expect Christ to be rude to the needy stranger.”

⁴² *Matt* 12:3,5; 19:4; 21:16,42; 22:31. Bradley, Jayson D., “3 Times Jesus Used Sarcasm to Make a Point,” [<https://relevantmagazine.com/faith/4-times-jesus-used-sarcasm-to-make-a-point/>]

⁴³ Trueblood, 116.

Above all, it is at complete variance with the general picture of Christ which we receive from the rest of the Gospel, particularly in connection to the poor and needy...⁴⁴

AND

If Christ could respond so quickly to the banter of the woman, “there is a reason to suppose that there was an element of banter in *His* own earlier and apparently insulting statements...words are made very different in connotation by the tone of the voice and by the look in the eye of the speaker.”⁴⁵

Conclusion

This study assumes several things:

- 1) Jesus welcomed and had compassion on Gentiles. He was not rude or sarcastic to people who came to Him in need.
- 2) It was not uncommon for Jesus to scold His disciples.⁴⁶ If you count duplicate pericopes in the gospel material, we have 37 clear examples of Jesus scolding His disciples.

⁴⁴ Trueblood, 122. This comment agrees with the position of this study.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 122-23.

⁴⁶ This list of 21 occurrences excludes the same pericope appearing in another gospel: *Matt* 8:26; 14:15; 15:16; 15:23; 16:08; 16:23; 17:17; 18:02; 19:13; 20:24; 26:10; *Mark* 4:13; 8:3; 10:48; *Luke* 9:45; 9:55; 10:41; 22:25; 24:25; 24:28; *John* 12:7.

3) Jesus used irony, humor and sarcasm.

4) Jesus is speaking Greek in this encounter. He and the woman obviously understood each other and it is unlikely that a Gentile woman living in a region with few Jewish people would understand Aramaic. The story easily reflects a dialogue between two people speaking the same language, making it likely that the woman could have detected Jesus using sarcasm.⁴⁷

This study is not intended to be a scoffing at the various theories presented through a wealth of scholarship. This writer has been challenged (and pushed) to read Matthew's gospel with a greater consideration that he has a Jewish audience wrestling with how to interact with fellow Christ-following Gentiles. However, it does appear that this story has been taken hostage by a need to squeeze it into an existing theory. The words of Levine above echo in my mind:

While almost all of the conclusions reached are plausible, some are mutually exclusive and none is verifiable. The chaotic state of scholarship

⁴⁷ Keener: "Jesus would have spoken with the woman in Greek..." 416n54. Also, see "The Use of Greek in First-Century Palestine: An Issue of Method in Dialogue with Scott D. Charlesworth," by Hughson T. Ong, Chapter 8, 218ff in *The Language and Literature of the New Testament: Essays in Honor of Stanley E. Porter's 60th Birthday* (Brill 2016). In his opening footnote Ong writes: "...Greek was widely spoken in ancient Palestine and that the language would have been the primary language Jesus used in his public ministry," 218n1. Gundry also believes Jesus is speaking Greek, 315.

is one indication of the drawbacks of this approach.⁴⁸

Most readings and explanations of this text, though offering many useful data points and new vistas for research, fall short in explaining the “harsh” comments made by Jesus. The various explanations seem to strain the text in order to accuse/excuse His words and actions. The reading presented in this study seems to better explain the comments of Jesus, does no harm to the text, and reflects the meta-narrative of the entire corpus of gospel material. From this author’s perspective this reading does not negate the boldness of the woman, nor does it negate the “Matthean community” theory. It is easy to accept that Jesus would use sarcasm as a corrective tool with His disciples. It is quite difficult to accept that Jesus would speak rudely to a Gentile woman in need as a way to justify healing her daughter. A rude Jesus elicits negative adjectives like “bizarre,” “shocking,” “humiliating,” and “derogatory.” This reading leads to an immediate response of “Oh my!” with a slight smile rather than “What?” with a grimace.

⁴⁸ Levine, 153.

[MY Comments are in blue. Reviewer comments in black.]

My Review Comments of the Peer Review Scholarly Comments

I am going to offer my comments/responses to those of the reviewers. You could call this defending my paper although I have no wish-dream of changing the any decision.

I think your scholars need to hear my critiques of their comments, lest they continue to offer peer-reviews without hearing criticisms from their "peers," other scholars.

Honestly, I think your journal should ask those who are rejected to offer a defense. That seems like the way we should approach scholarly works and disagreements...very much like when all of us had to "defend our thesis." Like each of you, I have read hundreds of journal articles that I did not agree with, yet learned from nonetheless. Just because you disagree is not a good reason for rejecting a paper. My "feeling" is that a lack of agreement is at least *part* of why these peers have rejected my paper. I could be wrong, which is fine. I hope you will pass these comments to my peers.

Reviewer #1: This paper examines whether Jesus' reaction to the woman in the narrative of Matthew 15:22ff. is indeed a harsh rejection of a woman in need. It proposes a different interpretation of the dialogue: 15:24 is a rhetorical question addressed not to the woman, but to the disciples. The statement in verse 26 is also a rhetorical question directed at the disciples. Only verse 28 (εἶπεν αὐτῇ) is addressed to the woman.

The article is unsuitable for Novum Testamentum for several reasons.

1. The author himself implies that the interest lies not in reconstructing the text within its original context (the Gospel of Matthew), but rather in removing the negative impression of Jesus: "It is quite difficult to accept that Jesus would speak rudely to a Gentile woman in need as a way to justify healing her daughter." (p. 27).

Yes, this is an apologetic/explanation for the comments of Jesus. THIS concept of Jesus being rude, or testing the woman, or putting her through religious steps is mentioned in most, if not every single study I read.

It is quite impossible to address every reading of this text or every concept that has been addressed through this text.

2. This is also reflected in the fact that the argument is not based on the Greek text itself—which is essential for exegetical argumentation—but rather on the English RSV (as if because the implied readership of *Novum Testamentum* reads in Greek).

While I understand this critique, I find it somewhat disingenuous on two counts: 1. None of the studies I used did a full parsing of the text in Greek. Most built some of their argument on the studies of others.

2. I disagree that exegesis is done primarily through the Greek text. Our translations are excellent for the most part. The context within the writing is almost more important than parsing the Greek. This reviewer alludes to that in his/her first comment, "reconstructing the text within its original context (the Gospel of Matthew)." Most of the studies I used were engaged in just this - reconstructing the text...without detailed Greek parsing.

3. I did engage in contextualizing this passage when I showed how *Matthew* had numerous accounts of Jesus *not* being rude, *not* turning people away AND doing so even when His own disciples were asking Him to "send them away." That is context and is not dependent on the Greek text.

3. The presentation does not differentiate sufficiently clear between the different pictures of Jesus in the Gospels of Mark and Matthew. The image of Jesus within which the pericope is interpreted must be ascertained from the entire Gospel of Matthew itself. A fundamental attitude of Jesus in all the Gospels, postulated here, has no argumentative force whatsoever (unlike the concept of "the metanarrative of the entire gospel corpus," see *passim*, cf. p. 11).

1. If "a fundamental attitude of Jesus in all the Gospels...has no argumentative force whatsoever," then WHY do so many scholars begin their discussion of this text with comments like:

Gench (I think citing Meier): "nowhere else in the Gospel tradition does Jesus address a sincere petitioner with such harsh, insulting language." p8-9

Hartman: "Jesus' behavior comes across as antagonistic and even un-Christ-like...This is not a kind and gentle Jesus..." p76
[Compared to what? The entire canonical gospel tradition.]

Jackson: "The troublesome words in v.26 about the children's bread have been softened or explained away by scholars, but not convincingly... p.1
[Why are these "troublesome words?" Because the entire gospel tradition does not typically have Jesus speaking like this]

Levine, *The Difficult Words of Jesus*: "...to compare her to a dog does not seem to me consistent with the Jesus who heals Peter's mother-in-law, touches a man with leprosy...stops the bleeding of a hemorrhaging woman..."

Anne Edwards: "This is the only example of Jesus refusing to heal someone in the gospels..." p.66

These are just five examples of scholars making a reference to this story in *Matt 15* being "the only time" in the gospels. I think your comment, "a fundamental attitude of Jesus in all the Gospels...has no argumentative force whatsoever..." is wrong. Almost every...single...study I read makes a statement like the ones above.

The ONLY reason to make these kinds of comments is because there is argumentative force in an odd comment within the gospel tradition only made by Jesus once. It's the same reason the exclusive logion is so odd. It does not occur in any other gospel, which alone calls it into question as a legitimate saying.

2. Your first comment seems to imply that I neglected "reconstructing the text within its original context (the Gospel of Matthew)."

This is a journal article, not a monograph. I was under a length obligation both in the main text AND with footnotes. "The image of Jesus...[of this] pericope... must be ascertained from the entire Gospel of Matthew itself."

It seems this reviewer wanted me to engage the "Jewish community" presupposition which I indicated in the intro was outside the breadth of this paper. In addition, I do not fully agree with the separate community idea. I am more in line with Richard Bauckham, "Gospels for All."

This is not a good reason for rejecting this paper.

On pp.15-16 I go through Matthew's gospel showing the willingness of Jesus to minister to ALL: Chapters 8,9,12,14. The feeding of the 5,000 in Ch 14 is a good parallel text. [this addresses the critique below in #4] The disciples want Jesus to "send them away" just like the pericope in question. Yes, this text is somewhat different from *Matt 15* - it is clear that the disciples are *not* urging Jesus "just go ahead and feed them."

4. The thesis itself is not coherently reasoned. The thesis that Jesus does not react harshly depends less on the question of WHOM Jesus is speaking to (the woman or the disciples). Rather, the issue lies in the assertion that Jesus is not making statements in verses 24 and 26, but rather formulating rhetorical questions. (Incidentally, it would first need to be clarified whether verse 23,

ἀπόλυσον αὐτήν, ὅτι κράζει ὀπισθεν ἡμῶν, could also mean that the disciples are urging Jesus to grant the woman's request.)

1. This is a great example of what I wrote earlier: "I disagree that exegesis is done primarily through the Greek text." Whether the disciples are asking Him to get rid of her OR "just do what she wants so we can have some peace," has NOT yet been ascertained by any scholar in a convincing way - so much for parsing the Greek! And how many other passages are still hotly debated even though scholars have and can parse the Greek text? The meaning of many Greek passages (like this one you just mentioned) is still up for debate.

2. I mentioned more than thrice that THIS is a problem Jesus has with His disciples (probably only the men - I cannot see the female disciples being like this) who do NOT share His merciful and gracious perspective:

5. The suggestion to read the sentences as rhetorical questions is not indicated by the Greek text (particularly because the sentences are introduced with ἀποκρίνομαι).

However, this does not help in the attempt to make Jesus appear less harsh: Rhetorical questions imply that the answer can be no other than agreement with the statement formulated as a question. This means, however, that even in question form, Jesus says nothing different than what emerges when the sentences are read as declarative statements: He was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and it is not good to take bread from the children, etc. - i.e.: he would not help the woman in need.

If the answer were meant to be something other than "yes," the Greek formulation would have had to be different (e.g., with μή). This, however, is the case in Matthew 8:7, a parallel text, because here an interaction of Jesus with a non-Jewish man and his request is recounted. 8:7 can be interpreted as an indignant counter-question (a parallel narrative, since it also deals with a distant healing and the faith of a non-Jewish person). Therefore, this premise of the paper is also incorrect: "If this is the only time Jesus speaks rudely to a needy person, perhaps we should pursue other options before we settle on this first reading" (p. 5).

6. The article incorporates a great deal of literature and categorizes it according to interpretations, which is good, but it is limited to English-language literature. This overlooks a significant portion of the research (see, in particular, the studies by Matthias Konradt). The references to secondary literature in the footnotes sometimes seem like reading recommendations. This is inappropriate; the cited literature should be discussed in terms of its arguments and premises.

This is a comment I have heard before. Once again, I think this is an absurd thing to bring up. I do not remember seeing very many non-English studies in ANY of the studies I read/used.

Deborah Forger study. German:5. None were interacted with, but were mentioned in footnotes as *recommended reading*. What? No studies in French???

Gullotta, *Neotestamentica* (2014): German:1.

Klancher, De Gruyter (2013): Latin:1, Portuguese: 3

She interacts with one main Portuguese work, but not in the section I was most engaged in - my articles were not focused on the feminine position.

Jackson, Glenna. *Have Mercy on Me: The Story of the Canaanite Woman*. United Kingdom: Sheffield Press 2002.

German:4, French:1 (all of these non-English studies were *recommended reading* only). This came in the main chapter I consulted of around 50 pages and 103 footnotes. Although I do not agree with many things in her book, this is a good study and she pointed me to 4-5 other studies that I used.

My training taught me that footnotes were breadcrumbs for scholars coming behind me - to lead them to other studies, ie. *recommended reading*.

7. However, a crucial area of research, and thus a central theme of the pericope, has been overlooked: the question of how the Jesus of Matthew's Gospel positions himself regarding the mission to the Gentiles. The obvious interpretation is that, based on this encounter (and on the parallel story Matthew 8:5ff), the Gospel of Matthew discusses the question of reaching out to non-Jews and answers this: In light of the woman's faith shown in verse 27 (verse 28!), Jesus is persuaded that it is right to help her, while the overall mission to all ἔθνη only starts when he is as the resurrected Lord over heavens and earth (28:18ff).

8. The final section, with its concluding remarks on humor and its reception history, seems arbitrary and is also unhelpful, since the terms humor and sarcasm are not defined at all.

Reviewer #2: This submission is not up to the critical standard required. The author appears to be arguing a foregone conclusion rather than examining evidence for what it offers. Overall, the piece seems to approach the text from an apologetic stance, seeking to rescue Jesus from a difficult situation where he is rude - e.g. on p. 3 the author says his rudeness is an anomaly, but this is hardly the case. (on p. 5, the author implies that the argument will 'remove it from that status' i.e. of being an anomaly - so this is not clear). Feminist scholarship is treated, but claims are often dismissed without a fair analysis.

In general, the author needs to take more time to explain and analyse examples. Some critical quotations are not analysed or explained so it's hard to see how the author intends them to be read in a way that is significant for the article's argument. At times other scholars are quoted and dismissed without evidence (e.g. AJ Levine, pp. 8-9). The Pseudo-Clementine excerpt likewise needs further explication to point out how the author sees this as Jesus directing 'dog' not to refer to the woman but to the disciples -- it is not explained.

The author suggests that the Canaanite woman and Jesus both 'break cultural norms' (p. 5) but it is not stated what these norms might be or how the author has determined what these norms are within wider ancient society. There are no supporting details for these claims. There is some vague discussion about Jewish law (pp. 9-10) but there is not enough detail to evaluate how or whether this supports the author's position.

The author makes a lot out of a supposed missing feminine pronoun, but it is not explained why this is significant (p. 14). Just because the 'dog' insult is not said directly at the woman does not mean it is not insulting or disparaging - it must at least have been said in her earshot! Methodologically, the author slips back and forth between treating Matthew's account as a literary one produced within a certain historical context (and therefore showing some literary or rhetorical

features) and treating it as historical - imagining Jesus in the pericope as historically hungry and actually tired. Methodologically this is not a strong position. The author should articulate a particular approach to the text, and be very careful about presuming a historical one-to-one match between the gospels and Jesus's own life - there is method for this, but the author has not engaged with it. What is at stake between the two positions? Why does it matter if this is the historical or the literary Jesus? These questions need to be addressed.

The idea of sarcasm is interesting, but in this paper doesn't seem adequately supported. The paper (p. 17) presents a hypothesis about intonation which doesn't match how Greek grammar treats rhetorical questions - it rather seems based on English-speakers' use of intonation to indicate a question. The next page assumes that this hypothesis is correct, skipping the step of researching the possible ways to prove/disprove the hypothesis. The discussion of sarcasm is largely supported with reference to blog posts rather than peer-reviewed material. For example, there is no definition of sarcasm or how it might be identified in texts outside the New Testament. There is no reference to ancient humour or how it is expressed (see eg. Sarah Emanuel's work).

Very odd use of italics throughout. Citations do not adhere to the style guide. Omit summary of the pericope - readers are likely familiar.