

- I. It's been a long week. I've been at our house in Georgia five out of the last eight days, making Herculean attempts to get our house cleaned and emptied before closing. You don't realize how much stuff you have until you move, or all the crevices you have hidden that stuff in until you have to clean it. I wish I could say I used this as an opportunity to share what we have hoarded, but time has been of the essence and so it's all gone in a storage unit. Not the best of excuses I know, but hopefully time will be on our side when we move into a house down here and we will pare down a bit. Our closing date which was originally supposed to be this coming Friday has been moved no less than five times, and at this point all I know is that it will be some time this week, but more than likely it will fall back to the original date of this coming Friday. I understand that my stress and anxiety may not be up to the level of which you might have lived with recently, but when you're in the midst of whatever stress your feeling whether it be at work, with your family, and yes, even at church it can seem overwhelming, and life can be a lot like those Southwest Airline commercials where you simply "want to get away." All I have wanted to do this week is get to 3:30 on Saturday. I have been working towards that deadline of sitting in front of a television at 3:30 on Saturday to watch the Georgia-South Carolina game as if that would be some cure all for my stress and anxiety of the week, when in reality watching my team play is anything but. I don't think I exhaled yesterday until we were up 34-10, but hey we all relax in our own ways. And when we have had a stress filled week all we want is to relax by whatever means we deem appropriate.
- II. Now, I'm not a big celebrity gossip guy, even with athletes. I don't keep up with the drama of their day to day lives, my drama is enough for me. I don't follow who they're dating or where they eat. I don't follow many of them on social media or subscribe to People magazine. I can't tell you if I've ever picked up a copy of the National Enquirer. But, there is a whole industry devoted to the insatiable infatuation with the lives of celebrities and athletes. I'm not attempting to pass judgment on you if keeping up with the Joneses or Kardashians is your hobby, but I think there is a point when it becomes unhealthy, and the paparazzi or fans begin to encroach too much upon the private lives of their subjects, I mean people. There is a point when the celebrities can feel claustrophobic, and we can almost dehumanize them with the microscopic lens we place upon their lives. They, like you and I want to relax too, maybe for them that means watching a football game, but it is more than likely something like taking their family out to dinner. They want a nice quiet night out, yet this is impossible to achieve because people continue to come up to take pictures or ask for autographs. Odell Beckham Jr, who plays wide receiver for the New York Giants, recently shared his frustrations with moments like these saying in effect, I want to be a good guy for the fans, but I also want to sit down and eat dinner with my children and wife and be a dad and husband. But as soon as I start getting agitated with fans all of sudden phones come

out, ready to catch you blowing up simply because for an hour you want to feel like a regular person with a family.

- III. I don't know if Jesus was ready to blow up, but he was tired and in need of a respite from the crowds and the constant hounding for healing. His only rest so far in the Gospel of Mark came immediately following his baptism, where in the wilderness he was tempted for forty days, not exactly the sort of rest and relaxation we would want. Jesus has been teaching and preaching, healing countless folks, feeding the multitudes, and he wanted to get away to a place where no one would know he was there. Maybe he needed space to pray, to let the part of him that was an introvert breathe a little bit before jumping back in and continuing his ministry. As much as the Gospel of Mark is the book of immediacy, there are several times where we see Jesus take a step back and pray, seek rest and renewal. But he goes to the 'wrong' end of Israel for such refreshment.
- IV. N.T. Wright states, "Jesus had come north, out of Jewish territory, not to preach and heal but to lie low for a while after doing and saying some quite risky things. Publicity in Tyre would have sent all the wrong signals; Jesus' work wasn't primarily that of an itinerant medical missionary, but of inaugurating God's kingdom." Being the Gentile area of Israel this is the perfect place to retreat, not many would know his name. Yet, if confronted to heal someone it would only add fuel to the already raging fire of the Pharisees that Jesus was operating against the law of God. The main thrust of Jesus' ministry was to be the Messiah for the Jewish people, so he goes to Tyre to get away from them for a time. But like when one of your children who comes into your room just as you are about to doze off for the night and wants you to get the covers one last time, Jesus is interrupted.
- V. The woman, a Gentile, of Syrophenician descent will not let him receive the R&R he sought. Even the Gentiles know who he is, they know the power of restoration which he has brought throughout the region, and the Syrophenician woman would not let this moment pass her by without asking for help for her daughter. There is no getting around the comment Jesus makes to her about dogs and children. It is more than likely not the best analogy Jesus could have made, referring to the Jews as children at the Lord's Table who need to be fed first, and let the dogs or Gentiles eat after the children have been fed. Some scholars have seen this as Jesus name calling the Syrophenician woman, because this is something we would do if we were at the end of our rope with people. Isn't that when the name calling begins, when we're just done with a given situation, or people who have frustrated us to no end. "You're a so-and-so, leave me alone, I want to take a nap." But Jesus isn't us. I believe the woman is pushing Jesus to consider moving ahead to the next phase in his ministry, and Jesus like with his mother Mary at the wedding in Cana is trying to illustrate that now is not the time.
- VI. In the Gospel of John, the wedding at Cana inaugurates the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. But it is a moment that Jesus did not readily accept. The wine runs out, and Mary simply says to Jesus, "They have no wine." And Jesus responds, "Woman, what

concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.” But guess what? Jesus turns water into wine, and so begins the ministry of Jesus with overflowing wine casks and the best wine in the land.

- VII. Jesus tells the Syrophenician woman, that now is not the time to take the mission to the Gentiles; it will come, just not quite yet. But her brilliant response pushes him to reconsider, almost as if in his attempt to rest her words provide him with a second wind to gather himself and go again. She says, “Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.” Jesus did not go to Tyre to heal more people, he wanted to get away, yet what he found was the spark that forever changed the trajectory of the mission. From his interaction with the woman he goes to the Decapolis and heals another Gentile this time a deaf-mute who after being healed could not stop singing Jesus’ praises no matter how many times or how loudly Jesus told him to stop. And then the crowds begin to gather again.
- VIII. In his rest, or lack thereof, Jesus found renewal from an unlikely source. His interaction with the Syrophenician woman not only gave him renewal for his ministry but it is an example for the disciples who later take the Gospel to the Gentiles with the power of the Holy Spirit after Jesus’ ascension. The table was extended to the dogs, and renewal began.
- IX. The Old Testament reading from Isaiah goes on to say, “A highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Holy Way; the unclean shall not travel on it, but it shall be for God’s people; no traveler, not even fools, shall go astray. No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it; they shall not be found there, but the redeemed shall walk there. And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.” In Jesus the unclean have been welcomed. Like your dining room table for a Thanksgiving feast, Jesus has added a leaf to the Lord’s Table.
- X. This is the prophecy that we have been brought in on because of Jesus moving forward with the next phase of his ministry, because of the Syrophenician woman’s unwillingness to wait for renewal for her and her daughter. In Jesus, the table has been extended where the dogs are no longer picking up the crumbs on the floor as an after thought, but sitting at the table as full partners in the life-giving ministry of our Lord and Savior who brings true and complete renewal to mind, body, and spirit.
- XI. When we are seeking rest and relaxation we often want to get away from our world, to not think about the stresses and anxieties that our lives bring. In order to do this we go on vacation, attend a concert or sporting event, we play video games, dive into a good book, or binge something on Netflix. These escapes offer a form of rest, they allow us to breathe, take the edge off, focus less on the pain and worries of our day. They allow us to feel the adrenaline rush of winning a round on our favorite mobile game. But our rest can also be used for the renewal of our spirit, it can provide moments for extending the table in our own lives at the most unlikeliest of times.

- XII. I did not seek a calling to ministry, but God provided a way. There have been times along this journey where I felt beaten down and wanted to pull the emergency brake and get off, but through the lives of friends and family, in moments of rest and relaxation, I have found rejuvenation and renewal to forge ahead with God's help.
- XIII. My hope for us today is that when we feel beaten down, we are able to find renewal in Christ for our lives. It is a renewal that will cause you to choose love and grace over spite and anger. It is a renewal that offers forgiveness and presents us with opportunities to put new leaves in the Lord's Table. Jesus' table is overflowing, there is bread and wine enough for all God's children we are called to share what we have come to know about our Lord and Savior, even when we want to kick back and relax.