

## The Canaanite Woman Who Showed Great Faith

‘Jesus withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon, and behold a woman, who was a Canaanite from that district came out, and with a loud [troublesomely urgent] cry, begged, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is miserably and cruelly possessed by a demon!”

But He did not answer her a word and His disciples came and implored Him saying, “Send her away for she is crying out after us.”

Jesus answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

But she came and kneeling, worshipped Him and kept praying, “Lord, help me!”

And Jesus answered, “It is not fair to take the children’s bread and throw it to the little dogs.”

She said, “Yes Lord, yet even the little pups eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table.”

Then Jesus answered her, “O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you wish.” And her daughter was healed from that very moment’ (Matthew 15:21 to 28).

Where the verse says her request was granted, Jesus was actually saying, “Whatever you wish for is yours.” This remarkable, faithful woman, was known only as the Canaanite woman. We need to study that passage in Hebrew to be able to understand it fully. Translations into other languages do not do it justice. Preachers who do not have a grasp on the Law of Moses, the covenant or the Hebrew language, actually believe Jesus was nastily calling the woman a dog! But He was not and nor would He ever say such a thing. Jesus was a thorough gentleman and always treated women with respect. The Canaanite woman knelt down and worshipped Jesus. That act in itself shows us she had turned away from her sin, repented and embraced the teachings of Jesus, so why would He then say she was just a dog? It’s not logical. When one person repents, all heaven and the angels rejoice (Luke 15:10). With that in mind, Jesus would not then insult the newly converted woman!

This Canaanite lady had the kind of faith that would just not give up, nor would she take ‘no’ for an answer. The attitude of Jesus towards this woman was not harsh nor ungracious. To fully understand Jesus’ words, we need to look at the history written in the Old Testament. The Jewish people living in Israel at that time, were told not to associate with non-Jewish people. The reason for that was to keep them away from outside influences and temptations. They had already been tempted into idolatry and had at one time married non-Jews. To keep the lineage of the Jewish people pure, God told them not to associate with outsiders. If the non-Jewish neighbours accepted God and obeyed His commandments, then the Jews were to accept them, welcome them and treat them with kindness. Since it is a command from God for the Jews to treat others with kindness, Jesus most certainly could not have disobeyed a strict command like this, and insult a desperate person. To do so would have been disobeying His Father, and Jesus could never have done that. To accept a repentant non-Jew and show kindness to them, is in line with the covenant the Jews had with the Lord. Two such non-Jews who were completely accepted into the Jewish faith were Rahab the Hittite and Ruth the Moabitess. The reason the Lord had to keep the Jewish blood line pure, was because the Messiah,

and therefore our salvation, was to come from the Jews (John 4:22). But unless those people repented and turned to God, they had to be kept at a distance and the Jews had to keep themselves separate from all other nations.

The Lord had, at the time of Jesus, sent the Jews their promised Messiah, and He sent Jesus to the Jews first before all other nations (Acts 13:46; Romans 1:16; 2:10). The Lord also promised to keep the Jews healthy, as long as they obeyed His commands (Exodus 15:26), and Jesus healed all their sick. Jesus never once turned a sick Jewish person away when they came to him for healing. Jesus came to the lost sheep of Israel first, in fulfilment of the covenant of Moses and God's promises to Israel.

God did not have any such covenant with any other nation, therefore they had no claim on Him. It was the covenant of God, that gave Israel the right to approach God through Jesus, as they did. Without a covenant with God, all other nations were considered 'unclean' or unholy. They ate foods that the Jews were forbidden to eat. They worshipped idols that the Jews were forbidden to worship. They behaved in a manner which the Jews were forbidden to. They were unholy people who acted in an unholy way. They did not belong to the Jews. One animal that was considered unclean was the dog, that is why Jesus said, "Healing is the children's bread and it is unfair to give it to the dogs." Healing belonged to the Israelites because of the covenant with God the Father, and Jesus was obligated to fulfil the covenant. Other nations were considered unclean, and Jesus implied that you don't take the bread (healing) that rightfully belongs to the holy children, and give it to the unholy; the unclean – or dogs. He was not calling the woman herself, a dog. What Jesus was saying was right in line with the principles of God.

Just as Jesus said, "Don't take bread and toss it to dogs," He also said, "Don't give that which is holy to the dogs and do not take pearls and toss them to pigs" (Matthew 7:6). Jesus was not calling anybody a pig in that verse, neither was He calling anyone a dog. He was referring to the holy and the unholy.

However, this Canaanite woman was so insistent and so smart, she gave Jesus one of the best answers He received from anyone. She agreed she was one of the 'unclean' people, but she knew Jesus was the one and only Person Who could help her. She didn't want the whole temple covenant – she just wanted a little crumb! One little crumb was sufficient to heal her daughter. "Yes Lord, even the little pups eat the crumbs." The woman was not asking for anything to be taken away from the Jewish people, she was asking for her little 'pup', her daughter, to be given a 'crumb' of healing by this Jewish Man; a discarded 'crumb' that had fallen from the table [of God's blessing to the Jews]. She had either seen or heard about Jesus perform enough miracles, to know He had the power to heal without anyone having to go to the temple and sacrifice an animal first. She didn't want or need all that, she just wanted a tiny piece; a crumb, and she had the faith to believe Jesus was able to give it to her. Her actions and her speech tell us that. Now we can understand why Jesus said with delight, "O Woman, great is your faith." Now we can see why He granted her everything she asked for, and healed her daughter.

The Canaanite woman related to Jesus in three different ways; desperation, humility and her insight. She was desperate for her daughter to be healed. Desperate people often go to greater lengths than other people and do things others won't do. Sometimes when our prayers seem to be unanswered for a while, we become desperate. She cried, "Lord help me!" Jesus never ignores desperate cries for help, when they are genuine.

The woman was humble. When Jesus inferred she was from an unclean nation, she could have been offended and stormed off, but she didn't. She admitted she was unclean, she worshipped Jesus and asked for the 'crumb' of healing. That is a sign of repentance. We also need to realise we are unclean sinners who need to repent and be cleansed in order to be healed. In the Bible, great faith is always united with great humility.

The woman had deep insight into the nature of Jesus. Outwardly, Jesus appeared to be stern, but by faith she could see through Jesus' seeming, apparent indifference. She saw His real, heart attitude; His love for humanity. Sometimes when we have to wait for the Lord to answer prayer, we can feel as though He is indifferent, but He never is, and there is always a reason why we have to wait for His perfect time. He seems stern, but He's not really.

We need to realise, that in Jesus' foreknowledge, He knew this Canaanite woman would turn to Him. He walked several kilometres out of His way, just to be in the region where the woman would be. Their meeting was no accident; it was a divine appointment. Jesus started at the Sea of Galilee and walked right across Israel to the North-west corner, ministered to that one woman, and there is no record that He ministered to any other person that day, then He went back to where He had come from. Jesus took what would have been a four day journey – two days each way – just to minister to that one woman. That is amazing. God the Father knew how desperate she was. The Lord is always waiting to be gracious to anyone who repents (Isaiah 30:18). He is watching and waiting for us to turn around and He sees us from a long way off and comes out to meet us (Luke 15:20). God knew this woman was ready for salvation and it drew Jesus all the way across Israel to meet her, to minister to the one need, and she worshipped Him. This story shows the love God has for people. He went a long distance to reach out to this family. He did not travel all that distance and go to all that trouble to insult her; He went the extra distance and to all that trouble to save her and her child. If Jesus really thought of that woman as a dog, He would not have gone to so much trouble for her.

When we hear preachers or pastors say that Jesus called the woman a dog, it shows that the speaker does not know Jesus' character very well; it is offensive and insulting to the Lord, for He never acts in such a way, and especially not to new converts; and it shows a lack of knowledge of the Law, the covenant and the scriptures. Jesus did not belittle her, He did not call her a dog; what He did say was that she had great faith. What she did was worship Him.

Amen and God bless you.

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