

Matthew 15:21-28 Bible Study Transcript

We are in Matthew 15:21-28, The Piety of the Canaanite Woman. The *piety*, or *reverence*, of the Canaanite woman.

In verses 1 through 20, we saw the protesting of the religious leaders. As a delegation from Jerusalem came up to Jesus up north, around the Sea of Galilee, and confronted Him with the challenge, "Why do Your disciples not wash their hands and break the tradition of the elders?" And Jesus' response was, "Why do you break the commandment of God by your traditions?" And with that Jesus turned to the crowd, not to the leaders, but He turned to the crowd and explained to them, "It is not what goes into your mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of your mouth." So, the traditions of the elders, they made up rules on how to ceremonially purify your hands and wash your hands in a certain way, religiously, even your pots and pans in order to make them ceremonially pure and clean in order to be able to eat off of. And Jesus said to the crowds, "It is not what goes into your mouth that defiles a person, it is what comes out."

So, in verses 12 through 20, Peter and the disciples came to Jesus privately and they said, "Don't you know that you offended the religious leaders?" And we studied last week, how the normal response to offending people is that people should never get offended by us. We should never offend anybody, that is not love. Well, Jesus offended people and showed us that, yes, you can offend people and you will offend people if you follow the truth in Christ. They will be offended. They will get their feelings hurt when you obey the Lord and follow what He wants you to do.

But then He said to the disciples, because Peter then asked the second question, "What about this parable about what goes into the mouth is not important it's what comes out of the mouth? What does that mean?" And Jesus told them, "What goes in the mouth passes through the human purification system and gets eliminated, but the real evil is the heart." And Jesus said, "It is from out of the heart that we speak evil. It is out of the heart that we do evil." And Jesus says, "That's what defiles a man, not what goes into your mouth."

So then, we come to our situation that we have in verses 21 through 28. Verse 21 says, **And when Jesus went out from there**, that is, the northern shore of Galilee, **He withdrew into the parts** (or coasts) **of Tyre and Sidon**. Tyre and Sidon are over on the Mediterranean Sea on the Eastern shore. So, Jesus leaves there because the religious Jews, the religious leaders in particular, were coming up against Him. He ministers the truth and He leaves and He goes over to the cities of Tyre and Sidon. Tyre and Sidon are seaports situated 18 miles apart, again, on the Eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea. It is in Gentile territory of the Phoenicians. These are Gentiles now, that He is going to in Tyre and Sidon, the territory of Phoenicia.

Then in verse 22 it tells us, **And, behold, when a Canaanite woman had come out from those borders**. She makes four approaches to get the Lord's help. Notice that she's called a Canaanite woman. Most English translations say, "A woman of Canaan," but it's *a Canaanite woman*. That is to say, everyone in that whole region is a Canaanite, no matter what their race is. Everybody in the region is Canaanite because that's the region of Canaan.

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In Mark 7:26, he tells us that she was a Gentile of the Syrophenician race. Specifically, the Jews held in their literature that she was a Sidonian from Sidon. Remember, He went to the seaports of Tyre and Sidon, so she came out of Sidon. She is a Syrophenician by race and she's from the land of Canaan, which is Gentile territory. She's not Jewish, is what Matthew wants to get across. She worships Astarte, the name of the goddess of the Phoenicians that she worshipped. And so, here's a picture of a woman who has no Jewish heritage, no Jewish background, no background in the proper worship and belief in the following of God. She worships idols and she's coming to Jesus with a very serious request.

In verse 22 it says, **And, behold, when a Canaanite woman.** Those two words *and behold* are in the original language, but interestingly it is not translated by the New American Standard or the NIV or the NET; they just decided it wasn't important. But it is important because it alerts the reader that something out of the ordinary has happened here and I want you to take notice. That's what *but behold* means, *but notice something*. A Canaanite woman had come from out of those borders to meet Jesus and to make a request. And it says, **And she cried out to Him, saying,** (four approaches we are going to study), **"Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely being demonized.** That is how it is literally translated. *Grievously vexed* of the English translations means *severely demonized*. Obviously, demon possession is what is being expressed here.

So, she comes to Jesus and the first thing she says is, "Have mercy on me." I take note that right away, in the first approach to Jesus, she asks for mercy. She has nothing of herself or of her self-worth to make the request on, her request is based strictly on mercy. She's not from the Jews. She's been an idol worshiper. She has not obeyed the Word of God because they didn't have the Word of God. So, she comes just on the basis of requesting mercy.

She calls Him two things:

1) She calls Him *Lord*.

She will call him Lord three times.

2) She calls Him *Son of David*, which is a Messianic title of the Jews. Son of David. Matthew likes to use this as a title for Jesus in his writings. Ten times in Matthew *Son of David* is used to describe the title of Christ. Four times Mark uses it, and four times Luke uses it. But Matthew uses it ten times.

So, she's confessing to Him, "I'm calling out for you to have mercy on me." She calls Him *Lord* and calls Him *Son of David*. She's recognizing Him and reverencing Him for being the Messiah of Israel. Yet she herself is not an Israelite and she's not Jewish.

She says, **"My daughter is severely being demonized."** In Mark 7:25 Mark tells us that this was a little girl. Her daughter was small, not a teenager, but younger than a teenager, and she needs help. "Have mercy and deliver her from the demons."

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Here is something we notice here; her reverence and the reverence of a non-Jewish person is contrasted with the religious leaders of the Jews who rejected Him because of their traditions and because of their pride. The Jews were God's chosen people and they rejected. And here is a woman who is an idol worshiper, has no inheritance with the Jews or with the people of God, and yet she comes and shows Him the reverence that the Jewish leaders should have done earlier. "Have mercy on me Lord, Son of David."

Verse 23a, the response, **But He did not answer to her a word.** Didn't even answer her. Paid no attention. I even had some discussions this week with people over this text. Some people said, "It sounds racist to me." Bigotry. Where is the God of love? All she wants is mercy. She is saying, "I'm not worthy and I have nothing to base my request on, other than just asking for Your mercy." And what does He do? He doesn't even answer her. Not a word.

Verse 23b, **And when His disciples came to Him, they were asking Him, saying, "Send her away, because she cries out after us."** The word *cries* is in the present tense, which means *she keeps on crying out after us*. And the word *cry* doesn't mean *cry with tears*, but it means *to shout* or *to call out*. "She's continually calling out after us." Interesting, because in the Greek text the word *after* is the word *behind*. So basically, they turn their backs on her, and she just keeps following them around and calling out, "Have mercy on me, my daughter needs to be freed from a demon." So, they say, "We've got to go talk to Jesus because we've got to get Him to send her away because He won't answer her now she's chasing after us." That was her second approach.

Verse 24, **But when Jesus answered to the disciples, He says, "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."** So, He says, "I've come as the Messiah to the Jews, to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, not to the Gentiles." So, He is telling them why He's not answering. Now that doesn't mean that the Gentiles were not chosen to receive the gospel later on, after He was crucified. Paul said in Romans 1:16 that the gospel goes out first to the Jew, and then to the Gentile. So, it is for both, Jew, and Gentile later on. In Romans chapter 11, Paul tells us that when the Jews finally rejected their Messiah completely, God went to the Gentiles and preached the gospel to the Gentiles and they were grafted into the vine and the nonbelieving Jews were removed. So at this particular point, He's coming as the Messiah of Israel, even though the Jews are rejecting Him as their Messiah.

"But this Canaanite woman is crying out after us."

"I haven't come to the to minister to the Gentiles."

Verse 25, The Compelling of the Woman. This is now the third approach. She made one approach to Jesus and one to the disciples, now, the third approach. **But when she came** (that is, to Jesus) **she was worshipping Him.** Notice the translation *was worshipping*. It's called the imperfect tense: continuous action in the past, *she was continually worshipping Him*. The word *worship* in Scripture does not mean *to sing*. We use the word very loosely about our worship services, it's a general term for what we do, but it is mainly applied to singing in churches today. The word *worship* does not mean *to sing*. The word literally means *to bow down in reverence*. It is a word that is used for people who show their submission by coming and bowing down in front of dignitaries, in front of the King, and here in front of the Messiah. She was continually

prostrate down onto the ground, showing homage to Jesus, expressing her attitude of submission to Him. And as she was bowing down to Jesus, she says to Him, **Lord help me!**

The word *help* - it's the only time it is used in the Gospel of Matthew and it is interesting because the verb form of this word is used for someone who would cry out for help if they were drowning. It's urgent. She's not just asking, "Help me," she's urgently expressing herself to Jesus in worship, in submission. And by the way, that is true worship. That's why Jesus said, we will see it later on in Matthew chapter 16, "You worship Me with your lips and with your mouth, but your heart is far from Me, and in vain do you worship Me, worshipping and following the commandments of man." So He says, "It's just lip service. In your heart, you're not in submission." That is the highest form of worship is to submit to the Lord. That is the highest form. Obedience is the highest form of worship. We can sing all we want, we can pray all we want, we can talk all we want, but submission and obedience is the highest form of worship. And she is showing that to Him there. Interesting, she says, "Have mercy on me," and now she says, "Help me." How can you turn that down?

Verse 26, **But when Jesus answered He said, "It is not right to take the bread of the children and throw it to the dogs."** The Lord is now answering with a home setting for us. The children around the supper table getting the main meal. He's making a play on the fact that the Jews consider Gentiles to be religious dogs and He's now incorporating that into this home setting. "It is not right to take the bread," and by the way, *bread* in this parable would represent *the gospel*. "It is not right to take the bread of the children," which would be the Jews, "and to throw it to the dogs," which would be the Gentiles.

So it's interesting, and I'm just one of those weird kind of guys, that I notice some things about Jesus that He'd never be able to get away with if He were here in our day in the flesh. First of all, He doesn't answer her. She wants mercy. The disciples won't help her. She asked the Lord for help and He says, "It is not right for me to give the bread of the gospel to the dogs." He calls her a dog. I've said it over the years, because these are the things, the weird things that I think about being in ministry, that if I ever did this to anybody, they would want nothing more to do with me. If they say, "I need mercy."

"Yeah, I can't help you."

"Help me!"

"No, it's not right to give the things of the Lord to the dogs, and you're a dog." Ooh. Yeah, either I wouldn't be around long, or they wouldn't be around long. One of those cases.

Now, the fourth and final approach in verse 27, **And she said, "Truth, Lord."** That's what the English texts say, the word *truth*, but it's literally the word *yes*, not the word *truth*. **But she said, "Yes, Lord."** She didn't get offended by what He said to her. She agreed. **"Yes, Lord: for even the dogs eat from the crumbs falling from the table of their lords."** In essence, for us, as we look at this and we say, "This is just a terrible way to treat somebody, or to answer somebody." In reality what makes us think we deserve anything from the Lord? What makes us think we even deserve any response from Him? As if we are holding Him hostage. "You are a God of love, you have to help me out and do things my way!" or, "Give me what I want, if you want me to be a child of God." Like we are doing Him a favor.

She is saying, "You are right not to answer me. You are right not to pay attention to me. You are right to call me a dog because that is what I am. But even the dogs eat the crumbs from the table." She says, "All I want is a little crumb that would fall from the table that the children are eating from. Just a crumb, that's all I want." That's all she wants. That's all she needs is a crumb.

And yet, at the same time, that is all it takes. It doesn't take much. Sometimes we think that we need fantastic miracles in order for great things that happen. Jesus said, "If you have faith the size of a grain of mustard seed, you can move mountains." The smallest of all herb seeds. You can move mountains with just a little tiny bit of faith. She says, "I just want a crumb. That's all I ask. Even the dogs eat crumbs." How do you argue with that logic?

Verse 28, **Then when Jesus answered he said to her, "O woman, great is your faith; let it happen (not *let it be*) to you as you desire." And her daughter was healed from that hour.** Several things, in closing, I want to point out to you to help you understand why Matthew is presenting this to a Jewish audience, obviously. If you checked Mark 7:24-30, his version of the same thing does not include a lot of Hebraisms. Matthew is writing to Jewish people here.

Notice the faith of the mother. I always use this when people blame others for not having faith. It was the faith of the mother that her daughter became healed and freed from the demon. It wasn't the girl's faith. I've said that to people many times. "Well, you know, if you just had faith you could be healed." And I would respond and say, "You can have faith for me. Where is your faith? It is not based on mine alone." Of course, they don't know answer that and they walk away because they always want to blame people for not performing correctly, for things not happening in their life the way they want it to.

Then He says, **"Let it happen to you, as you desire."** You see faith was working all this time. Faith was brought to fruition and blossomed here at the end. And notice those characteristics of faith because that's the title to verse 28, The Character of the Woman. Her character is faith. To understand this teaching here, we have to understand what the Biblical teaching of faith is. This is very important because most the time it is taken out of context.

1) Let me say to you, first of all, the definition of the word *faith*. The word is **πίστις** (*pistis*) in Greek and it means *persuasion*. It comes from the Greek word **πείθω** (*peitho*) that means *to persuade*. So, it is a persuasion.

2) Secondly, the Bible teaches that the source of faith is Jesus Christ, not people. Hebrews 12:2 tells us that we are to, "Look unto Jesus, the author and the finisher of the faith." He authors it. He's the source. Remember, it is persuasion, He authors that persuasion.

3) Thirdly, the production of faith. Galatians 5:22 says, "The fruit of God's Spirit is joy, love, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith." Faith is produced by the Spirit of God. It is a fruit of the Spirit of God, not a fruit of man.

And just as a side note because we do deal with the translations, in Galatians 5:22, in the list there that faith is listed as a fruit of the Spirit, most of the modern translations, and I think even the New King James, changed the word *faith* to *faithfulness*. The old King James kept the original translation of *faith*. Why would they change it? You look up some of the notes. Some of these Bible translations, and some of the newer translations out, are strictly so that it seems logical and reasonable to man. Because here, if faith is a fruit of God's Spirit, then what is our responsibility? So, they say, "It can't be *faith*, it must be *faithfulness*. We are the ones who produce the faith." No, it's not. Not Biblically. That is not what the Bible teaches.

4) Fourthly, the giving of faith, I Corinthians 12:9 says, "The Holy Spirit gives faith to people."

5) And then living by faith. Romans 12:3, Paul says, "For I say through the grace given to me, to everyone that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God has measured to every person the measure of faith." You function and think according to the faith that God measures to you, not any more, not any less. Unless you get carried away with the human performance. He says, "Think soberly." Anything done by the Lord in your life is done by the Lord, not you. And the faith that you have is been given to you by Him, it didn't come from you.

So, my own personal definition of faith, taking all of my studies of faith from the Scriptures, my own personal definition of faith is that: *Faith is the presence and the activity of the Holy Spirit in a person's life*. His presence. He's active just being present. His presence and activity. Remember, it's persuasion. He persuades us. He moves us to do certain things and to go in a certain direction and do things a certain way.

What we have in this text, is Jesus purposely taking a woman who has no faith, no religious background with the Jews, she's actually an enemy of God from the Canaanites, she is an idol worshiper, she has no respect and reverence for the God of Israel as she is naturally, as a human being. God sent out the least likely to get anything from God, because she'd be an abomination; and what happens is, God puts faith in this woman, and draws her to come out to Jesus, as an example to two people.

1) To the religious Jews.

Basically, what He is saying to the religious leaders, "This is what faith is all about. If you did not reject Me and you did not follow your traditions, this is what faith would be." Calling out for mercy. Calling out for help. Admitting that you are equal to the dogs and you don't deserve anything the Lord gives you, rather than demanding that He give and to give it a certain way. So she was an example. This is what faith looks like. She didn't do it, God did it.

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Just like in Matthew chapter 8, the centurion soldier. The Gentile who was a soldier, who came to Jesus and asked the same thing about his servant, to be healed. And Jesus said, "I have not found such faith in all of Israel." He is making the comparison to the Gentile soldier with all of Israel. Jesus was saying, "I came to My chosen people and they rejected me. Over here the people who rejected Me, look they have faith." What a contrast.

2) And the second thing it shows us, (first of all, an example to the Jews and religious leaders) it is an example to us. This whole process that she went through was a process to bring faith to fruition. You see, if I come to the Lord and I say, "Lord have mercy on me," and He doesn't answer me and I get in a huff and I take off and get all upset with God because of the way He doesn't answer me or the way He does answer me, that is not faith. I'm not motivated by God's Spirit. I've the wrong approach, the wrong attitude. I mean, what if He doesn't answer me? What if He answers me in a way that I didn't ask, or didn't want Him to? Well, He's the Lord, the Son of David. And I say, "Lord help me," and all it takes for God to help is a crumb, that's it. Just a little crumb. It can move mountains.

So, it is an example to us about faith. What faith is really all about. If I approach the Lord seeking His help, or seeking to follow Him, and He does things a certain way to get me all upset, or something I don't agree with and I turn my back on Him, then I'm not motivated by faith. It's ego. It's personal. Faith takes you all the way to the end, to the point where you take the crumb if it's given to you because He is worthy to be worshipped. He is worthy of our submission. Faith brings a person to Christ on His terms and based on His promises. That's what faith does, genuine faith that comes from God.

So the moral of the story, we use Jeremiah 29:13, God says, "And you shall seek me, and you shall find me when you search for me with all of your heart." That is what she did. She didn't stop at step one. She sought the Lord all the way to the end, until it was just a crumb. "All I need is a crumb." He is worthy to be worshipped in submission and obedience. He is worthy to submit to His will and His way of doing things, realizing it doesn't take much from Him to accomplish His purposes.

Let's close in prayer.