

**Matthew 15:21-28** Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. <sup>22</sup> A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession." <sup>23</sup> Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, "Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us." <sup>24</sup> He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel." <sup>25</sup> The woman came and knelt before him. "Lord, help me!" she said. <sup>26</sup> He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs." <sup>27</sup> "Yes, Lord," she said, "but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." <sup>28</sup> Then Jesus answered, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed from that very hour.

Dear believers saved by the grace of God:

A guy brings his dog into the vet. Sadly, the vet says it has passed away, but the man doesn't want to believe it. So the vet brings in a cat that sniffs the dog. The vet says, *"I'm sorry, but the cat thinks your dog is dead too."* The man still is leery. So the vet brings in a black Labrador that does the same thing. The vet says, *"I'm sorry, but the black lab thinks your dog is dead too."* The vet then tells the man the charge is \$650. The guy says, *"650 bucks to tell me my dog is dead?"* The vet says, *"Well, it would have been \$50, but the additional \$600 was for the cat scan and the lab test."*

In a similar way, how many times and in how many ways do we have to be told to be humble? You'd think with all the troubles we bring into our lives by acting proudly and speaking arrogantly, it would be obvious that what we need is a good dose of humility. You'd think that almighty God becoming a defenseless baby would teach us; or God allowing himself to be beaten and slaughtered on a cross would do it. But no. Day after day our attitude remains: what I say and what I think is much more important than anyone else. We don't take God's diagnosis seriously!

Over the years I've read many commentaries and heard many thoughts about this lesson from Mt. 15. But it really boils down to this: ***"Jesus Seeks a Humble Heart."*** (1) ***Humility is the starting point of a believing heart,*** and (2) ***Humility sees the importance of Jesus.***

# 1

Jesus' disciples, like us, struggled mightily with humility. They even argued about who was the most important and who would have the highest position in Jesus' kingdom. So what does Jesus do? He uses a simple, humble Canaanite/Gentile woman to teach them a lesson they would never forget. She would be their "cat scan and lab test" to help them face reality/see the truth. (Twice during his ministry Jesus commended someone's faith. Neither time was it a fellow Jew. Both times it was a Gentile -- an outsider -- that Jesus holds before the Israelites as an example of true, humble faith.)

In the account, a Canaanite woman (a non-Jew) came to Jesus crying out with a request. ***"Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession."*** Now let's humbly remember throughout this story that Jesus is true God who sees people's hearts, knows their every need, and sees the future perfectly. At first, Jesus does not answer the woman. But she is persistent! She keeps calling out and the disciples become annoyed. What a racket, a nuisance! ***"Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us!"*** they said.

So at this point, what is Jesus seeing? He's seeing a humble woman in need who actually believes Jesus is more than a healer. She called him ***"Son of David,"*** which is OT language for the Messiah, the Savior of the world from sin. He also sees a woman who loves her daughter dearly and will not be denied an audience with the King of kings. And he sees a group of irritated disciples who needed to learn an important lesson about the kind of humility this woman possessed.

Jesus speaks surprising words. He answered, ***"I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel."*** ***The woman came and knelt before him. "Lord, help me!" she said. He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs."*** Jesus was saying, ***"You know that my job is to share***

*the gospel beginning in Israel. Out of all the nations, God chose this people from whom the Messiah would come.*" In other words, the time of the Gentiles is coming after the children of Israel eat. By the way, notice Jesus says, ***"the children's bread and toss it to their dogs."*** The "dogs" he refers to here are not wild, scavenger dogs, but children's pets, lap dogs. Their time to eat of Christ's salvation would come. His words were not a slight, but meant to elicit a tenacious faith that would bring forth blessings for her and teach lesson to his disciples who would soon go to the Gentiles. Someone wrote, *"Think of Jesus saying this with a twinkle in his eye."*

2

The woman's response fills Jesus with great joy. She displays the humble heart that is the beginning point of true faith -- so important for the disciples to see. ***"Yes, Lord," she said, "but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table."*** In other words, *"You're right, Jesus. I agree. I don't deserve to have you help me and my daughter. My people have been fighting and killing your people for centuries. We've hated each other. But I realize that you are the real deal, the Savior from God. I understand your mission and my position. But can you please spare a few crumbs of your power to help a sinner like me?"*

How humble! She believed Jesus' power was greater than any obstacle of race, gender, or disability. Jesus said, ***"Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.' And her daughter was healed from that very hour."*** She asked for crumbs but received riches.

This woman was a profile in courageous faith that stormed the throne of God in prayer. This woman was also a teacher of Jesus' disciples. In this account Jesus helps his followers understand what a privileged position they (we) hold as God's chosen people. But this high position does not give us reason to be arrogant. Just like this woman, we are merely sinful people who should be standing on the outside looking in and begging for help. And God helps us -- simply by his grace.

William Tindale once said, ***"God bringeth no man to heaven except he send him first to hell."*** Joseph, e.g., was pretty high and mighty until God humbled him in Egypt. Then he became a most useful servant of the Lord. The same is true for us. None of us is superior to anyone else. God's cat scan and lab test confirm it. We are dead, but Jesus makes us alive by grace!

Amen.