

The context of this seeming harsh story is a discussion and a debate over “that which defiles”.

Jesus had to correct the Pharisees practice of external righteousness—worrying about what food they ate, what rituals they practiced etc. Instead, he’s had to reorient them to the true nature of sin. That which defiles is already in your heart.

Original Sin—Jesus is establishing in the passage the doctrine of original sin, or sin by nature. A person isn’t a sinner because they sin, a person sins because they’re a sinner by nature.

Jesus has already confronted their hypocrisy. Their hypocrisy is on display by their selective practicing of Moses’ law. They set aside the actual written Word of God for the sake of their man-made traditions which are not biblical. **Hypocrisy is the kind of thing that we’re blind to unless someone else points it out.** And that person is usually a spouse or a 7-year-old child.

The entire lesson is to show them that Jew and gentile alike are all guilty of sin, and sin issues from a corrupted heart and is not a matter of external defilement.

Jesus withdrew to the ill-famed region of Tyre and Sidon—these are historically areas where pagans live in opposition to God. **Tyre and Sidon in particular are cities in Philistia/Phoenicia** and are regularly spoken of in the OT as the objects of God’s judgment. Jesus has used these cities, along with Sodom in a previous sermon (Ch. 11). **In that sermon, Jesus denounces the multitude of miracles he had performed in Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum—because the miracles did not produce the repentance of heart that he expected.**

Matthew 15:21-28

21 Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. 22 A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly.”

23 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.”

24 He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.”

25 The woman came and knelt before him. “Lord, help me!” she said.

26 He replied, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.”

27 “Yes it is, Lord,” she said. “Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table.”

28 Then Jesus said to her, “Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.” And her daughter was healed at that moment.

A Canaanite Woman—The Canaanites had generational antipathy and animosity for the Jews and the conquest as it recorded in Joshua. **Demon possession: What do we know about it?** Probably tied to the pagan practices of idolatry and through false idols the worship of demonic spirits. This worship often involved blood sacrifices, the reading of omens, and offering a child to the spirit. **This innocent Canaanite kid is now oppressed by a controlling spirit.**

Jesus initially ignored her—Jesus appears to be acting in a rude fashion. He ignored the woman’s repeated cry, even though she has tried to appeal to him as the Son of David. Why is calling him the “Son of David” significant?

- **But, in pagan thought, Solomon was thought to have been a miracle-working king.** Pagan’s had circulated the myth that King Solomon (David’s heir) had a magical ring or amulet that he used to exorcise demonic spirits from people. In other words, her knowledge of who Jesus is is very limited, and she probably holds a mythical belief about him as a Jewish magician and Son of Solomon.

The disciples urge Jesus to send her away. Turn her down—let her know that you are holy rabbi and she is defiled sinner.

Jesus’ reply is a test of responsiveness. “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.” The Messiah is Israel’s King. He is the promised Christ, Son of David, Son of Abraham—follower of Moses’ law. Israel is the wellspring of the covenants, the promises, the Torah Law—and the Messianic hopes for the world. And so technically, his answer is correct. He’s Israel’s Messiah.

But Matthew has already stipulated that the Messiah would be a man of outreach.

Matthew generally has a favorable view of Gentiles and Jesus’ mission to them.

- **It’s the Magi who show up and honor Christ**—these men are from Babylon and they are astrologers.
- **The Roman Centurion:** The other person in this Gospel that Jesus says “has great faith”—in fact Jesus says this man has greater faith than anyone he’s met in Israel (the chosen people) is the Roman Centurion who displays astonishing faith in Jesus.
- **Jesus grew up in the region that is called “Galilee of the Gentiles”**—he undoubtedly interacted with lots of gentiles and was quite comfortable around people of other ethnicities.
- **Jesus has given parables to the effect of reaching out to all the nations of the earth** such as the Kingdom Parable of the Mustard Tree—which when fully grown after many years will accommodate every kind of person—regardless of their origin or ethnicity.
- **At the end of the Gospel, Jesus commissions the disciples** to go out and reach all ethnic groups with the Good News.

So clearly, Jesus’ response to her is a test her responsiveness—does she really believe he can do what she has asked.

Nameless: Stories of Grace for the Brokenhearted
The Woman Who Begged for Scraps / Matthew 15:21-28
Jeff Kennedy / June 2, 2019

Jesus, by way of analogy, asks “is it right to give the children’s bread to the household dog?”

Her response is remarkable—she answers wisely “Yes, but even the dogs eat the scraps that fall from the table. I am not here to make any claims on you—to presume upon you—I am here for the scraps.”

Jesus shows his true heart in this—he holds her up to the often-faithless disciples, as a contrast to the faithless and racist Pharisees.

It’s an unforgettable lesson for the disciples. The disciples would never forget the juxtaposition of a self-righteous hypocritical Son of Abraham who has put the emphasis of his life on mere externals of religion—worthless external measurements of personal piety. The super-religious reject their own Messiah—while a woman who had no share, no right to claim anything from Jesus—a sinful Canaanite—shows the true heart of God and the right posture of seeking faith.

There’s enough forgiveness in the heart of God for all men. Enough mercy for the devout and the wanderer.

Jesus’ attitude in this encounter is not only a test of responsiveness—it’s a rebuke to the prevalent attitude among the super religious of his day; and the snoozing, lukewarm Galileans of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum.

Principles of Faith

1. Her faith was in the right object—Jesus the Messiah. Her belief was not a complete theology. It was reaching out to Jesus as far as she knew. “Son of David” was a declaration and affirmation of cultural expectations.

She likely knew little or nothing about Jesus’ divine status. In fact, this insight would have been shortly after Jesus’ resurrection.

She affirms the light of revelation that she has access to. God ministers powerfully in mercy.

Illus. An Island girl named Christina. Raised in dark occultic religion, knew little about Jesus except what her friends told him to invite her to a Gospel meeting at the local church in town.

I had just given my testimony of faith in Jesus, right after my pastor, and a bunch of kids were coming forward and praying at the front of the room. It was a beautiful moving scene—to watch the power of the Spirit descend on those folks as they cried out for God.

Suddenly I found myself being led out the side door of the church by some concerned teens—they led me by the hand down the side stairs and out toward the outhouses behind the church. In the hardened dirt between the back of the building and the outhouses was a crowd of people circled around someone—it was Christina—the girl who had been invited by friends from the church. She looked to me as if she were being slammed and thrown around by some unseen force. The kids turned to me as and asked, “What can you do pastor?” I said, “I’m not a pastor I’m just a kid.”

But two things happened to me in that moment. (1) I had a discernment in my knower that this wasn’t mental illness, it wasn’t for show or attention—it was demonic in its origin. (2) I experienced zero fear and total confidence in the power of the Lord to set her free. I knew that I knew that Jesus wanted to set her free.

So, not knowing what else to do, I took her by the hands and stood her up and told her “Christina, Jesus Christ sets you free” and she stood up and shrieked and screamed louder than I’ve ever heard another person scream. And just like that—the fog was gone—her darting eyes rested and focused, her shaking convulsing body at rest also. And she began to weep tears of joy for deliverance.

I saw her later that week at the church camp we were running out of the local church and she was clear eyed, smiling, happy—learning about Jesus.

I guess what I want to say about that is this—Jesus didn’t wait for Christina to go through confirmation class first before offering her grace and deliverance.

Listen, your theology might be totally screwed up today in lots of ways. But that doesn’t mean that Jesus wants nothing to do with you until you can recite the Westminster confession or the Nicene Creed. If you reach out to him—as far as you know—as far as you understand—and you cry out for

mercy and compassion—the God of all comfort will meet you in your distress, and in your time of need.

2. Her faith was persistent in the face of an apparent denial.

At first it clearly looks as if Jesus has no intention of helping her, no intention of even acknowledging her existence. The harsh reality is that she appears to be ignored by the one man who could have helped her poor daughter.

But as we saw, Jesus' lack of acknowledgment was a test of responsiveness—and also a lesson for the Disciples to not fall into the Pharisees mentality of spiritual elitism and hypocrisy.

So she, despite the apparent denial, persists and doesn't stop asking. Jesus shows that he is in fact testing her commitment, her faith—and rewards her faith and persistence.

Jesus taught the need to pray and not give up. Like, the parable of the judge and the persistent widow. Jesus gave them this parable to teach them that they should always pray and not give up.

- Assume the answer is yes until you hear a definite no.
- Assume that what appears to be a denial is a mere delay.
- Ultimately, we must leave the outcome in the hands of God, who still has the right to say “no” or “not yet” or “not the way you thought.”

3. Her faith was not presumptuous. When Jesus challenged her with the analogy of the children's bread not being thrown to the household dogs—she could have gone away sad and offended but she didn't.

Her response shows that she was not presuming anything. Did she have the right to ask anything of the Jewish messiah? No. She was a foreigner and a member of Israel's age-old enemies.

Her answer to Jesus' test shows that she understood that anything from the Master was pure grace. An act of mercy.

“I'm not asking for the Jews' inheritance, I just want a few scraps from the children's table.”

How much more blessed are we when we ask God for provision?

We learned in our Ephesians series that we are the adopted heirs of Christ's Kingdom—blessed with all the spiritual blessings in heavenly realms.

The true character of faith is an open and empty hand—not a spirit of presumption.

We should ask in humility—not presuming anything from God but trusting in his great and precious promises.

4. Her faith was great faith.

Great faith isn't great in quantity but in quality.

It takes great faith to believe in a fantasy. Canaanite religion held to many gods, Dagon, Marduk, Asherah. Their creation stories are fantastical, absurd myths that don't square with reality at all. It took great faith to believe in the Canaanite fantasy.

A surplus of faith is only required when you've got a small, limited, finite god. If your God is made in the image of man then you're going to need a whole lot of faith.

When your God is the infinite, personal, creator of the universe, who has become incarnate in the Son—Jesus, you only need a mustard seed of faith.

If you believe in a truth claim that has less than a mustard seed of evidence, then you need a mountain of faith.

But if you believe in a truth claim that has a mountain of evidence, then all you need is a mustard grain of faith.

And we need to come to God with quality of faith that reflects the greatness of the God in whom we trust.

So what do we do when God's answer is anything other than what we hoped?

- **The church is praying for James in Acts and he dies brutally as a martyr. Yet, Peter is saved.**
- Paul ministers for a decade in Arabia and intends to go back that way—Yet the Spirit doesn't allow him and sends him on toward Rome a different way.
- Jesus in the Garden asking that the Father provide another way.

Illus. CS Lewis losing the love of his life. Lewis didn't start out with flawless faith—he started his Christian life out with sufficient faith. **But that faith was perfected in the trials of loss.** There is a lesson in an answer to a prayer that we never thought to ask.

In watching his wife waste away to the disease, Lewis learned faith in the face of fear. He famously stated in his book ***A Grief Observed***, “No one ever warned me that grief was so much like fear.”

He went on to write “God has not been trying an experiment on my faith or love in order to find out their quality. He knew it already. It was I who didn't. In this trial He makes us occupy the seats, the witness stand, and the judge's bench all at once. He always knew that my temple was a house of cards. His only way of making me realize the fact was to knock it down.”

I want to tell you something about Jesus and healing. This part is kind of shocking—it doesn't go down so well.

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Jesus isn't just interested in only meeting needs—*he mainly wants to get my attention*. he's a teacher and rabbi. He's always interested in the lesson of faith, there's always a message in everything he does. More than anything, Jesus wants us to learn something about him, and through him—about ourselves.

This woman's name is persistence—because even when it seemed that Jesus was denying her request—she kept the faith, she persevered and stayed the course.