

The Faith of a Canaanite Woman (Pentecost Study 12) Matthew 15:21-28

21 Then Jesus left Galilee and went north to the region of Tyre and Sidon. 22 A Canaanite woman who lived there came to him, pleading, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! For my daughter is possessed by a demon that torments her severely."

23 But Jesus gave her no reply, not even a word. Then his disciples urged him to send her away. "Tell her to go away," they said. "She is bothering us with all her begging." 24 Then Jesus said to the woman, "I was sent only to help God's lost sheep—the people of Israel." 25 But she came and worshiped him, pleading again, "Lord, help me!" 26 Jesus responded, "It isn't right to take food from the children and throw it to the dogs." 27 She replied, "That's true, Lord, but even dogs are allowed to eat the scraps that fall beneath their masters' table." 28 "Dear woman," Jesus said to her, "your faith is great. Your request is granted." And her daughter was instantly healed.

Q.1. Why might Jesus have left Galilee? (look back at Matt 14-15)

Q.2. Speculate, what might Jesus have hoped to do while in Tyre/Sidon?

Q.3. Look up Genesis 9:24-26, 17:8, Ex 13:11-12, Lev 18:3, Jos 3:10, Judges 1:27, 3:1-5, Ezra 9:1, Ps 106:6, 34-39. What are we to think of Canaanites?

Q.4. What might the Canaanite woman have heard about Jesus that led her to appeal to him?

Q.5. Look up Matt 1:1,20, 9:27, 12:23, 21:9, Acts 13:34, Rom 1:1-3. What is the significance of the title 'Son of David'? Do you think this woman understood the significance of this title?

Q.6. Why didn't Jesus respond to her first appeal v.23a?

Q.7. What do you think the disciples wanted Jesus to do v.23b? Why?

Q.8. In v.24 Jesus seems to dismiss her plea by explaining his primary mission. What does he hope will happen next?

Q.9. Speculate, why did she still 'worship him' v.25?

Q.10. What does Jesus mean by v.26 'It isn't right to take food from the children and throw it to the dogs.'? What is the food? Who are the children & dogs?

Q.11. By calling non-Jews 'dogs' v.26 is Jesus being racist? If not, what's his point?

Q.12. Explain in your own words the woman's reply v.27?

Q.13. If v.26 is right, why does Jesus heal her daughter v.28?

Application: for reflection, prayer and action

Q.14. Why do you think Matthew included this story in his Gospel?

Q.15. If you were the woman would you have persisted as she did?

Q.16. What lesson(s) is the most important for you from this story.

Matt 14:13-21 (my suggested answers)

NB. Please answer the questions yourself. We all have different ways of answering; God may give you greater insights than mine. Put '*John thinks*' ... before each answer.

A.1. To escape the crowds, the Pharisees, Herod Antipas

A.2. I think Jesus went there for time-out with his disciples (a retreat) – maybe to focus his teaching on them.

A.3. The ancient Canaanites were generally a wicked race who came under God judgement – through the Israelites. They led Israel astray too often.

A.4. She had heard about his healing miracles and his ancestry (David) and concluded he could help her.

A.5. The title is both 'royal' (a King) and 'messianic' (an Anointed One) It is a 'Son of David' who will come to rescue and renew Israel.

A.6. Jesus may have wanted to see her resolve/faith in him or maybe he didn't want to draw attention to himself (being on retreat).

A.7. The disciples don't like the public attention, so they urge Jesus to send her away – it's unclear if they want him to either heal her daughter or simply send her away; probably the latter.

A.8. Jesus wants a low profile, so he explains his mission is not to help her, but to help lost Israelites. He hopes to quieten her outbursts and explain his inaction.

A.9. She worships him because she realises he is the best hope for her daughter. As the Son of David (Messiah?) she hopes to persuade him to help her.

A.10. Jesus is explaining that his primary vocation is to Israel. His food (powerful presence) is for the Israelites, God's children. It's not right to ignore Israel and give his attention to Gentiles (using the slang word – dogs).

A.11. He's repeating a well-known Jewish term of abuse directed at Gentiles. I think his motive was to encourage the woman to stay strong in her faith. He does so because he knows she will already know that is how Jews might respond to non-Jews. Maybe he's further testing her faith/resolve. I don't think he is being racist.

A.12. Your words.

A.13. Jesus heals her daughter to as a response to her faith, her wise words and her resolve.

A.14. Matthew includes this so that his readers will be assured that everyone, even a Canaanite, comes under God's compassion and healing power.

A.15. I hope I would for the sake of my daughter.

A.16. Three lessons for me – i. persist in prayer & worship (as this woman did); ii. In faith, keep looking to Jesus in all the ups & downs of life, iii. God's love includes everyone, even past enemies