

LESSON 9
April 28, 2024

Unit II: The Measure of Faith
Help for an Outsider

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 61
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Matthew 15:21-28
PRINT PASSAGE: Matthew 15:21-28

KEY VERSE

Jesus answered and said unto her, **O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.** (Matthew 15:28, KJV)

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Jesus said to her, **“Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.” And her daughter was healed at that moment.** (Matthew 15:28, NIV)

Lesson Aims

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do the following:

- **Wrestle with the interaction between Jesus and the Canaanite woman.**
- **Persist in faith when there is no assurance of a desired outcome.**
- **Extend grace to someone whom you have previously been reluctant to accept.**

***Key Terms**

Crumbs (verse 27)—Greek: *psichion* (**psikh-ee'-on**): crumbs (of bread); little morsels.

Dogs (verse 26)—Greek: *kunarion* (**koo-nar'-ee-on**): little dogs; house dogs; properly, puppies.

Sidon (verse 21)—Greek: *Sidón* (**sid-one'**): a maritime (or great coast) city of Phoenicia.

Tyre (verse 21)—Greek: *Turos* (**too'-ros**): an ancient city (the capital) of Phoenicia.

***(Word Study Supplement—Refer to page 2)**

Introduction

Many would agree that society is afflicted with multiple self-perpetuating problems: racism, corruption, discrimination, violence, and elitism. These systemic problems paint a clear picture that an individual's race, skin color, gender, and ethnicity can adversely affect opportunities and access to education, top-paying jobs, certain neighborhoods, health care, and political influence.



The Biblical Context

Matthew 14–20 marks a change in Jesus' ministry. During this period, Jesus often withdrew from the crowds to spend time alone with His disciples for three practical reasons: the escalating hostility toward Him by His enemies, His need for physical rest, and His desire to prepare the disciples for His approaching death at Calvary. These periods of withdrawal were filled with opportunities to minister because the crowds followed Him, moving His heart to meet their needs (see Matthew 14:13-21, 34-36). Matthew 15 opens with a confrontation between some Pharisees and Jews who challenged why Jesus' disciples did not follow the traditional handwashing ritual before eating. Instead of responding to their question, Jesus challenged their violation of God's commands through their traditions (see Matthew 15:1-20). After the encounter, Jesus and His disciples traveled north of Israel to the coastal cities of Tyre and Sidon. There, Jesus met a Canaanite woman whose faith He tested before revealing that Gentiles would also share in God's kingdom (see Matthew 15:21-28).

Unfortunately, these “systems” dehumanize people as objects vulnerable to manipulation by the “powers that be.” Systemic problems are not unique to secular society. Since ancient times, people have wrestled with the notion of “difference” and whom to include and exclude from their circles. Ancient Jews practiced overt religious privilege systems and refusing to accept all non-Jews. Sadly, the modern church is not exempt from perpetuating “systemic challenges” regarding whom they will evangelize or fully accept into the congregation of believers. Even among believers of the same race and ethnicity, some are slow to fully welcome those they consider to be too different from themselves or beyond salvation's reach. The church in this climate must seek the mind of Christ, who came to seek and save the lost without regard to race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, appearance, or lifestyle preferences.

ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

Persistent Faith's Request (Matthew 15:21-25)

KJV

21 Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon.

22 And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have

mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.

23 But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us.

24 But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

25 Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me.

NIV

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.

Jesus withdrew to Gentile territory anticipating a period of rest and retreat from the increasing opposition from His enemies, and His expanding popularity among the people (**verse 21**). At some point, a Canaanite woman, approached Jesus, repeatedly pleading for mercy and addressing Him as Lord and Son of David, a messianic title. She asked for Jesus’ help on behalf of her severely demon-possessed daughter (**verse 22**). The woman’s address and request indicate that she possessed some knowledge of Jews and their religion. Matthew does not reveal the nature of the daughter’s demon possession. It could have been a drastic personality change, refusing to wear clothing, violent actions and self-mutilation, deafness, muteness, supernatural strength, or a combination of many other possibilities. Regardless of the details, the need for deliverance was desperately urgent. Initially, Jesus remained silent (**verse 23a**). However, the disciples’ response indicates that the woman continued begging for His help to the point of their exasperation. After a while, the men urged Jesus to send the annoying woman away (**verse 23b**). The disciples were well-acquainted with Jesus’ typical response to the hurting; we can assume they wanted Him to heal her child so she would go away and leave them alone. Jesus finally responds to the woman telling her that He was commissioned (by God) to help His chosen people, Israel, and not Gentiles (**verse 24**). The desperate, determined woman was unfazed by Jesus’ denial. She continued to plead for His help by humbling herself in Jesus’ presence (**verse 25**). This Canaanite woman displayed consistent faith in Christ and His power to show mercy to her daughter. How did she find courage to overcome cultural norms regarding Jewish men speaking to women in public and the barrier of racial discrimination between Jews and Gentiles? There are no clues in the text to indicate how she heard about Jesus, but she was evidently convinced that He was the solution to her situation. The woman acted boldly on what she had heard about Jesus. She demonstrated as much (if not more) faith in what Jesus could do than many who claim to have walked with God for decades. Do you have “faith that doesn’t give up”? Is your faith strong enough to confront and defy social barriers that promote injustice and division?

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Given Jesus’ negative response toward her, why do you think the woman refused to take “No” for an answer?

Persistent Faith Rewarded (*Matthew 15:26-28*)

KJV

26 But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children’s bread, and to cast it to dogs.

27 And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table.

28 Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.

NIV

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.

Jesus’ first response did not deter the woman’s persistence. Taken out of context, Jesus’ words in **verse 26** may appear harsh, prejudicial, and unfeeling. Although ancient Jews often labeled Gentiles as “dogs” as a form of disrespect toward them, this was not Jesus’ intent. Translated into English, the Greek for “dog” is “little dog,” designating a pet. Here, Jesus is comparing God’s relationship with Israel and the rest of humanity. His underlying purpose was to test the woman’s faith. Her response in **verse 27** proves that her faith in Jesus was genuine. The woman was not even slightly discouraged by being called a “dog.” Instead, she answered that even pet dogs are allowed to eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ tables. Therefore, the woman symbolically reasoned by faith that Jesus can choose, as the Master, to allow the “dogs” (Gentiles) to eat the “crumbs” that the children (Israel) either waste or reject. The woman’s attitude and behavior revealed her conviction that Jesus is Lord and Messiah and was able to heal her child. Jesus responded by praising her great faith, rewarding her bold persistence, and granting her request (**verse 28**). Jesus’ denial was merely a test of the woman’s faith and lesson for the disciples that “outsiders” (Gentiles) would share in God’s kingdom. What is the depth and quality of your faith in God? Have you matured to the level of trusting Him for what you need and relying on Him to accomplish His purpose for your life? Such persistent faith is sometimes rare or uncommon among believers. Like the Canaanite woman, those who seek the Lord’s blessings must also seek Him personally, surrendering to His lordship and standing firmly in the truth of His Word.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Describe how you would persuade someone to persist in faith even when the desired outcome seems bleak or unlikely.

A Closing Thought

The Canaanite woman who found Jesus and pleaded for Him to heal her demon-possessed daughter was not distracted by any expression of cultural prejudice or gender bias against herself. She demonstrated persistent faith by remaining focused and convinced that Jesus, as Lord and Messiah, was her only source of help. By faith, she pleaded with Jesus to extend the “leftovers” of Israel’s blessings to her before completing His work among God’s chosen people. Such commendable faith resulted from hearing about Jesus, and believing what she heard. You can

strengthen your faith by knowing the Scriptures and applying them to your life. Knowing God more fully will help you to reach past social distinctions and other differences to touch others with the love of God.

Your Life

Make this lesson personal by examining your personal determination to persist in faith even when you face rejection or have no assurance that things will work out as you desire. Like the Canaanite woman, you will someday confront your own desperate situations in life. In the face of your toughest obstacles, be determined to humbly acknowledge Christ for who He is, recognizing Him as the only source of help for the challenges you face.

Your World!

We don't have to look far to see the result of systemic societal problems. This lesson challenges the faith community to collectively acknowledge and confront the systems that deny access to equitable resources and representation. Together, God's people can break down barriers that block others from coming to Him by faith.

Closing Prayer

Dear God, You have called us to be Your redemptive agents in the world and reach people without regard to society's cultural norms. Help us overcome our "hang-ups" and give us persistent faith to show Your love to everyone without prejudice or exception. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Conclusion

(Preparing for Next Week's Lesson)

Next week's lesson from Unit III, "Standing in the Faith," will examine justification—that is, God's declaration of righteousness by faith in Christ alone (Romans 3:21-30).

Home Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY, April 29	"Vindicate Me, O Lord, My God"	(Psalm 35:1-7, 22-28)
TUESDAY, April 30	"Blessed Are They Who Fear God"	(Psalm 112)
WEDNESDAY, May 1	"Repent and Turn to God"	(Acts 3:12-26)
THURSDAY, May 2	"God So Loved the World"	(John 3:1-8, 13-17)
FRIDAY, May 3	"Lord, Lead Me in Your Righteousness"	(Psalm 5)
SATURDAY, May 4	"Christ, Our Atoning Sacrifice"	(1 John 1:1-2:2)
SUNDAY, May 5	"Atonement by Christ's Blood"	(Romans 3:21-30)