

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

It seems that Jesus was indifferent toward this Canaanite woman who was in need of His help. Matthew 15:24 could give one that perception on the surface: "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But Jesus' ministry was not exclusive: "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost." Jesus came to be the Savior of the world, even though his ministry was first to the Jews.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd who is concerned about all of the lost sheep regardless of whether or not they are Jews or Gentiles. This story is but only one incident of how Jesus reached out to those who were not Jews. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him" (John 3:16-17).

We need to remember that many of Jesus' own people rejected Jesus who said that He was a prophet without honor in His own country (Mark 6:1-13). We also need to remember the comparison of how well most of the Gentiles that we read about responded to Jesus and His message unlike many of the Jews who rejected His message. The Pharisees in this story stand in sharp contrast to the Canaanite woman as to how each is receptive to Jesus or not. The reasons are clear: the woman needed Jesus' help, and the Pharisees were far too concerned about the traditions of men which Jesus said made void the Word of God (Mark 7:8, Matthew 15:6).

This Canaanite woman was vulnerable because of her nationality. Canaanites were traditional enemies of the Jews. The infamous historian Josephus once wrote "...of the Phoenicians it is known the Tyrians have been

"Jesus and the Canaanite Woman" Matthew 15:21-28 Reminiscere 2025 most of all in the same ill disposition towards us:" (Apion Book 1). It was in Tyre where Jesus encountered this woman after He had gone out of Jewish territory and into Phoenician territory where the Sidonians and Tyrians lived. Perhaps Jesus went there to escape the hostility and insults of the Scribes and Pharisees. After all, it would have been highly unlikely for almost any Jew to follow him into Gentile territory, because Jews avoided Gentiles. The Jews considered the Gentiles to be unclean because of the pagan practices of their culture.

This Canaanite woman was vulnerable because of her need. The disciples thought of this woman as if she were a nuisance. And they wanted to be rid of her. Yet, the woman was persistent because she was interceding on the behalf of her daughter who was demon possessed. Jesus was obviously the only One that could help her daughter. The way that she greets Jesus calling Him "Son of David" tells us that she already knows about His ability to heal. This mother's love for her daughter was far greater than any social boundaries.

"A young woman left for college one autumn. Before she left, she asked her mother to look after the potted violets and her aquarium in her bedroom. Her mother, who often seemed distracted, assured her that she would water the plants and take care of the fish. The daughter left with assurances from her mother that everything would be cared for. Two weeks after leaving, the girl called home, and, in the course of the conversation asked how the violets were doing. The mother apologized that she'd forgotten to water them and that they all died. A couple of weeks later, the daughter telephoned and inquired about the goldfish, the mother confessed that she had been busy and had neglected to feed them, and had found them all dead. After a long pause, the young woman asked with anxiety in her voice, "And ... how is Dad?"

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Unlike this neglectful mother, the Canaanite woman was anything but neglectful. The only thing that she neglected was the social custom where Gentiles and Jews would avoid each other. This mother was not about to let a social barrier get in the way if she could help it. Can you see this mother’s loving devotion? She was interceding for her daughter who did not have the capacity to take up the matter herself because of her demon possession.

On the surface, Jesus seems to be insulting her. Jesus called this woman a dog. To call someone a dog in that time was an insult. To call someone a dog in modern is also an insult. To call someone a dog in those days was to imply that a person or persons were impure and unclean. The Jews spoke of the Gentiles in this way----dogs. There are two Greek words for dog. Kuon was used metaphorically which meant a street dog that was a scavenger and unclean. The other Greek word for dog is Kunarion which meant little dog or puppy. The Kunarion was the type of dog that was a house pet whereas a Kuon would have been a stray dog that was not tame. Even though Jesus called this woman a dog, He referred to the house pet variety.

Jesus had a purpose which appears to have been twofold. He was testing the woman’s faith. Secondly, it seems that Jesus was also teaching the disciples something because He broke away from the usual custom. Jesus still referred to this Gentile as a dog but in a way that was not insulting. In fact, it has been said that Jesus must have said this with a smile.

Notice the difference between Jesus’s own people in this story, namely the scribes and Pharisees as it compares to this woman. Jesus said of them: "So, for the sake of your tradition, you have made void the word of God. You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: 'This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men'" (Matthew 15:6-9).

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Now look at what this Canaanite woman did: "But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me" (Matthew 16:15). Her actions were sincere, and her worship was certainly not lip service! She was worshipping in "Spirit and truth".

When Jesus was testing this woman's faith, He already knew how she was going to respond before she spoke a word. What Jesus was doing was testing this woman's faith for her benefit. Jesus rewarded her faith much like he rewarded the faith of the Centurion who interceded for his slave. "And he answered, "It is not fair to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." Then Jesus answered her, "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire." And her daughter was healed instantly." Amen.