

Scraps from the Table

Matthew 15:21—28

Introduction

Years ago, in a moment of weakness, while struggling with epilepsy, I tried to file for disability. I'm glad it didn't work out because I turned back to the Lord and have since relied solely on His providence. But while I was sitting in the waiting room at the Social Security office, I noticed that the walls were plastered with posters about AIDS and how people could get financial help if they had that. I felt like I had the wrong disease. I'm not in the right group, the *in* crowd. That's the way it was with the Canaanite woman in our Gospel lesson today.

Jesus Withdrew (v.21)

Jesus *withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon* (v. 21). After hearing of the death of John the Baptist, Jesus *withdrew to a desolate place by Himself* (**Matthew 14:13**). He needed rest. But the crowds followed Him and He ended up teaching them and feeding them (**Matthew 14:14—21**). Then He walked on water and calmed a storm (**Matthew 14:22—33**). Next, He healed many who were sick in Gennesaret (**Matthew 14:34—36**). Last, He got into a controversy over traditions and commandments with some Pharisees from Jerusalem (**Matthew 15:1—20**). Jesus had been extremely busy, and He really needed to get away from these people. Tyre and Sidon are in Phoenicia, northwest of Galilee, a foreign country.

“Lord, Son of David” (v.22)

But here's a Canaanite woman calling Jesus *Lord, Son of David* (v. 22). She recognizes Jesus as the Messiah. She then proceeds to tell Him her problem, *“My daughter is severely oppressed by a demon”* (v. 22). She knows the Messiah has the power to heal her daughter.

Jesus Did Not Answer (v. 23)

But Jesus remains silent. He doesn't send her away, yet He doesn't respond to her request. Why would He do that? Jesus was building the tension, allowing the woman to demonstrate her faith. Would she persist or would she give up? Of course, He knows what she will do, but He wants her to prove her faith to herself and the others around her, specifically, His disciples. Jesus doesn't respond until His disciples beg Him to send her away, much like they tried to keep the little children away in **Mark 10** (**Mark 10:13—16**). They saw her presence as an intrusion and a nuisance.

“I Was Sent Only to the Lost Sheep...” (v. 24)

Punctuation is not written in ancient Greek. It is implied by the meaning. For this reason, some scholars have proposed that Jesus was asking a question. *“Was I sent only to the lost sheep of Israel?”* (v. 24). This would have been a soliloquy, asking Himself the question, as if He is struggling with the program He was sent to do against the immediate need of this foreign woman. Or He could be helping her prove her faith.

She Knelt, Saying, “Lord, Help Me” (v. 25)

No matter what it was, it didn't deter the woman. She just *knelt at His feet and cried out, “Lord, help me” (v. 25)*. She needed the Master's help and nothing was going to prevent her from getting it.

“Throw It to the Dogs” (v. 26)

While Jesus' previous words may have been a soliloquy, this was a response to the woman's begging. The Jews thought of the Samaritans as dogs. But Jesus doesn't use the derogatory term for a wild stray dog. The term He uses refers to a house dog, a pet, a puppy.

“Even the Dogs” (v. 27)

But the woman is quick to pick up on that. For that's what house dogs do, they eat the crumbs that fall from the table. She knew that even the scraps of grace would be enough for her.

Healing (v. 28)

Jesus is pleased with her faith and tells her that her request will be fulfilled. And *her daughter was healed instantly (v. 28)*, another miracle at a distance.

Application

This woman shows us what true faith is like. It recognizes Jesus for who He is. It's not afraid to ask Him for help. It's persistent. It's humble. And it's rewarded. But maybe this story speaks to us on a different level. We are not dogs, but children of God by the grace of God. And we have a seat at the table of the King Himself. And we are told to eat to our heart's content. Jesus said, *“I came that they might have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10)*. An abundant life is a full life. It doesn't mean that all our wants will be met, but all our needs.

The Lord's Table

One place where we see this fleshed out is at the Lord's Table. We all come and eat freely of the body and blood of our Lord. And when we do, we receive all the grace we need for the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. No scraps for us here. We have everything we need.

*And the peace of God,
Which surpasses all understanding,
Will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
