

# POWER HOUR

4/28/2024

Lesson Text:  
Matthew 15:21-28

Background Scripture:  
Matthew 15:21-28

Devotional Reading:  
Psalms 61

“FAITH OF AN A CANAANITE”

NLT TRANSLATION

Learning Facts: To summarize Jesus' encounter with a Gentile (Canaanite) woman.

Biblical Principle: [To understand Jesus' mission.](#)

Daily Application: To understand Jesus' mission.

## Matthew 15:21-28 NLT

**21** Then Jesus left Galilee and went north to the region of Tyre and Sidon. **22** A Gentile 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.

## HOW TO SAY IT

<b>Canaanite</b>	<b>Kay-nu-nite</b>
<b>Phoenicians</b>	<b>Fuh-nish-unz.</b>
<b>Syrophenician</b>	<b>Sigh-roe-fih-nish-un.</b>

## LESSON CONTEXT

The events leading to the Scripture text reveal the intended expansion of the gospel message. Jesus practiced His teaching by going into Gentile territory. He left Israel and withdrew again, this time into the area of Tyre and Sidon. The Gentiles were “unclean” as

far as the Jews were concerned. Jews referred to the Gentiles as "dogs." That Jesus would minister to Gentiles was no surprise (Matthew 12:17-21), though at that time, the emphasis was on ministering to Israel (Matthew 10:5-6).

As Jesus' ministry in Galilee drew to a close, it became evident that His people would reject Him and His mission (see Matthew 13:53-58). His disciples oftentimes failed to understand His teaching (Matthew 15:12-20). Even the religious leaders were offended by Jesus' message (Matthew 15:1-9). The people most expected to accept Jesus and His mission failed to understand. Mark 7:24-30 is a parallel account of Matthew 15:21-28. As you read the lesson, consider which character in the story with whom you most identify. Do you align with the (outsider) woman or the (insider) disciples? Either option will affect how you view God's gracious and generous blessings.

### **First Request: Matthew 15:21-24**

#### **1. Where did Jesus travel to next? Why? (Matthew 15:21)**

Matthew 15:21 is not the first time Matthew's Gospel states that Jesus went from one area to another (compare Matthew 4:12; 12:15; 14:13). After He confronted the religious leaders (Matthew 15:1-9), He departed from their midst.

Jesus frequently withdrew from crowds of people so that He could pray in solitude (examples: Matthew 14:23; Luke 5:16). He also removed Himself from those who might misunderstand His ministry (example: John 6:15).

In today's lesson, Jesus left Israel and withdrew again, this time into the area of Tyre and Sidon (outside of the country of Israel). Tyre and Sidon were two prominent cities located on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea north of Galilee, in the region that is modern-day Lebanon.

#### **2. Who came out to meet Jesus? (Matthew 15:22a)**

Jesus was trying to remain hidden (Mark 7:24), but somehow this Canaanite woman heard where He was and came to Him with her need. Matthew describes her as being of Canaan, but Mark is more specific, noting that "the woman was a Greek, a Syrophenician" (Mark 7:26). The Canaanites were an ancient people who had settled in Palestine before the arrival of the Israelites (see Exodus 3:8). During the time of the ancient Israelites, the Canaanites were considered the enemies of Israel (example: Deuteronomy 7:1-6). Their descendants became the Phoenicians—people living in the regions of Tyre and Sidon. This woman was certainly not of Jewish heritage, and her ethnic background would have been seen in a negative light by most first-century Jewish people (compare Acts 10:28).

### **3. How did the woman address Jesus? What request did she make of Him?**

#### **(Matthew 15:22b)**

The woman approached Jesus as "Son of David." Because this designation reflected a uniquely Jewish expectation, it is shocking that a Gentile woman used it about Jesus. She would have been the most unexpected person to recognize Jesus as the long-awaited descendant of David. Before this event, some people had questioned whether Jesus was the Son of David (Matthew 12:23). This woman spoke in a way that reflected her genuine belief about Jesus' identity and mission.

Next, the woman's cry for mercy resulted from seeing her daughter suffer demon possession. The New Testament writers understand devils and unclean (evil) spirits as the same thing (examples: Luke 8:2, 29). Neither Matthew nor Mark describes the daughter's symptoms. Others who experienced demonic possession also experienced physical disorders (examples: Matthew 9:32; 12:22). Therefore, we can assume that the daughter suffered similarly.

### **4. How did Jesus respond to the woman's request? (Matthew 15:23)**

Jesus was silent. Of course, He knew her heart, and His silence could also be considered a test of the strength and quality of the woman's faith. Jewish teachers and rabbis sometimes tested their students, and Jesus was no exception (examples: John 5:6; 6:6). The strategic silence created space for the woman to continue talking and explaining her desires.

The woman had become a nuisance to Jesus' disciples. They did not address whether they thought Jesus should grant her request. Instead, the disciples wanted the woman out of their midst. Did they not think she was worthy of Jesus' aid because she was a Gentile woman? (compare John 4:9).

### **5. What did Jesus acknowledge concerning His mission? (Matthew 15:24)**

Jesus did not send the woman away as His disciples requested. The text is unclear regarding whom He answered. If His answer was directed at the disciples, He was reminding them about the mission for which His heavenly Father had sent Him (Matthew 10:5–6).

Jesus' primary mission before His resurrection focused on the house of Israel. They were like lost sheep without a shepherd (examples: Numbers 27:17; 1 Kings 22:17; Ezekiel 34:5–6; Zechariah 10:2; Matthew 9:36). As a result, Jesus came as a shepherd for the people. He provided spiritual care and guidance, like a shepherd caring for sheep (see Ezekiel 34:23; Luke 15:1–7; John 10:1–18, 27–30).

Central to Jesus' mission as a shepherd was His preaching on the need for repentance and the presence of God's kingdom (Matthew 4:17). This mission was first revealed to the people of Israel. God's blessing would be offered first to them. Then through them would blessing be available to all peoples (see Genesis 12:1–3; Isaiah 49:6–7).

To be clear, Matthew's Gospel is not conveying an anti-Gentile sentiment. Old Testament prophets proclaimed that the Messiah's mission would include Gentiles (examples: Isaiah 19:16–25; Hosea 2:23; Zechariah 14:16). With a few exceptions (example: Matthew 8:5–13), Jesus' earthly ministry focused on the people of Israel. He acknowledged that His mission would reach Gentiles (see Matthew 24:14; 25:31–33; 28:19–20).

## **Second Request: Matthew 15:25–28**

### **6. What was the metaphor used by Jesus to respond to the woman's repeated request for help? (Matthew 15:25-26)**

The woman did not debate Jesus on the direction of His mission. Instead, she sought relief in a way that could only come from a desperate mother. She came humbly before Jesus and worshipped Him saying, "Lord, help me!"

Jesus responded with a metaphor to the woman's request for help. The statement highlights that the bread is given to the children of the household first and foremost. By children Jesus means Jews, and by dogs, Gentiles. Jesus' attitude was intended to test the woman's faith. Jesus is not angry with her but is trying to teach the disciples a valuable lesson. Having been rejected by the Jews, He now turns to the Gentiles, a move that will later shock some of His followers. He had healed Gentiles earlier, but here in Phoenicia, He does not want to give the impression that He has totally abandoned Israel. The term for dogs (Greek *kymarion*) means little dogs (pets). It is inappropriate for sustenance to be handed out to dogs when it would deprive the children.

In this statement, Jesus highlighted expectations regarding the order of the mission of God. Some Jewish people considered that the Messiah's mission came first and foremost for the people of Israel. Therefore it would have been inappropriate for Jesus to do anything concerning this Gentile woman.

### **7. How did the woman respond to Jesus' statement? (Matthew 15:27)**

The Gentile woman accepted that Jesus was sent to Israel (Matthew 15:24). But she did not accept that He was exclusively sent to Israel, and she did not take Jesus' answer as a no. Instead, she built on His words, pointing out that the dogs did not have to take food from children in order to receive the blessing of the crumbs.

She immediately seized on His illustration of the children's bread, which was exactly what He wanted her to do. We may paraphrase her reply: "It is true we Gentiles do not sit at the table as children and eat the bread. But even the pet dogs under the table can eat some of the crumbs!" What a tremendous testimony of faith!"

### **8. What did Jesus say and do regarding the woman's faith? (Matthew 15:28)**

We cannot but admire the patience and persistence of this Gentile mother. So did Jesus! It was this faith that Jesus acknowledged, and immediately He healed her daughter. It is worth noting that both of the persons in the Gospel of Matthew who had "great faith" were Gentiles: this Canaanite woman and the Roman centurion (Matthew 8:5-13). This Canaanite woman knew what could be hers, even as a Gentile and, thus she became an illustration of millions of Gentiles who would later be blessed by the Messiah of Israel!

## **CONCLUSION**

### **Great Faith for God's People**

The woman in the lesson was the ultimate "outsider" to a first-century Jewish audience. She was aware of the biases against her. The deck would be stacked against her if she approached a Jewish teacher. Despite that awareness, she came to Jesus anyway. Her desperate situation and her suffering daughter necessitated a bold act.

The woman's behavior revealed a persistent and great faith. As a result, she received mercy from the Son of David. She was considered an "outsider" to some people, but she was an "insider" because of her life of faith.

This Scripture text invites us to desire a life of great faith. What blessings do we fail to receive because we limit or misplace our faith? A life of great faith requires steadfast confidence that God will show mercy to everyone. How does your perspective need to change in this regard?

## **QUESTION(S)**

- What steps can we take to increase our faith in God before we see Him act?
- What steps will you take to address possible roadblocks that challenge your faith?

## **PRAYER**

Heavenly Father, we are grateful to be part of Your family. Reveal to us the things that prevent us from having great faith. Encourage us when we feel unable to show persistent faith. Give us eyes to see people we consider "outsiders" so we can invite them to

experience Your great mercy. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

**THOUGHT TO REMEMBER**

Live by great faith!

**ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON**

Next week's lesson is "Justified by Faith" and summarizes Paul's teaching on salvation by faith in Christ's sacrifice, not by works. Study Romans 3:21-30.