

THE MESSIAH TEACHES WHAT IT TAKES TO RECEIVE FROM GOD

MATHEW 15: 21–28

Introduction

This is a difficult passage to understand because of Jesus' apparent attitude toward a person with such a desperate need. He was both silent (v. 23) and pointed (vv. 24, 26). However, one thing needs to be remembered: we do not know what was happening in the heart of the woman, but Christ did. He knew every thought of her heart, and He knew exactly what was needed to lead her to a personal faith in Him.

In addition to this very basic fact, three other things are clearly known.

1. Christ was not rejecting the woman nor refusing to meet the need of a desperate person. He never turned from a person who genuinely sought Him.
2. Christ was not harsh or mean to the woman. His harshness (justice) is never manifested except against sin.
3. At first the woman saw Jesus only as the Son of David, a great miracle worker. She saw Him only in terms of earthly power, as a great man who was to liberate people from their ills and problems whether national or personal. She needed to grow in her concept of Christ.

The fact that the woman needed to grow in her faith is probably the key to interpreting what is happening between Christ and the woman. She simply needed to learn step by step that Jesus is the Lord who is to be worshipped (v. 25). He is the Master of all lives (or dogs, vv. 26-27), and a person must persist and demonstrate humility in seeking Him.

- I. A knowledge of where Jesus is (vv. 21-22).
- II. A cry of need (v. 22).
- III. A persistence that will not quit (vv. 23-24).
- IV. A spirit that worships Jesus as Lord (v. 25).
- V. A spirit of humility and surrender (vv. 26-27).
- VI. A great faith (v. 28).

I. *Mathew 15:21–22 Regions*

Jesus withdrew to Gentile regions. He withdrew to the northern border of Tyre and Sidon. The word *regions* (ta mere) means the ports or borders.

Jesus was deliberately withdrawing to the borders of Gentile country. He needed time and quiet to prepare both Himself and His disciples for the end. The only place He could find freedom from the crowds and from His opponents was in the northern area, the area

bordering Gentile territory. No Jew was likely to enter Gentile areas. From this point to His reentering the vicinity of Magadan (Mt. 15:39), the miracles He performed were on behalf of the Gentiles. In the present passage, a desperate woman approached Jesus.

It should be noted that this event foreshadowed the spread of the gospel worldwide and God's great desire for all barriers to be broken down (See Eph. 2:11-18; 2:19-22).

The Canaanites were not just ordinary enemies but ancestral enemies of the Jews.

II. *Mathew 15:22 Intercession*

A cry of need. The woman cried out for three things.

1. She cried for mercy. No matter the need, Jesus can never turn from a desperate cry for His mercy. But two things are essential: one must cry for mercy, and one must cry to Him, the true Lord. Many cry, but not to Him.
2. She cried for the Son of David to hear her (See *Jesus Christ, Son of David*, Mt. 15:22).
3. She cried not for herself but for another person, her daughter. The woman had a desperate need – her daughter was under the power of Satan.

Note another fact. She had an inadequate concept of Jesus, yet she got Jesus' attention. How? She possessed two qualities from which Jesus can never turn.

- a. She truly loved another person, her own daughter. She loved her so deeply that she considered her daughter's problem her own: "Have mercy *on me*" she cried. Her love was much more than the normal love or sympathy. It was true oneness, a *union of living* between her and her daughter that she felt.
- b. She approached the right person, Jesus Himself, and cried out for mercy. Despite her inadequate understanding of Him, she did the right thing: she approached the *true Lord* and cried for His mercy.

Thought 1. How many experience their children's living under the influence of Satan, in a different sense, perhaps; but nevertheless living in the sin and shame on account of the devil?

Thought 2. How many loved ones would have their needs met if we interceded for them as this woman did for her daughter?

- 1) Do we honestly love as she did?
- 2) Do we honestly cry out to the true Lord, as revealed in Scripture or according to our own idea of God?

John 14:13-14 "And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it."

Mat 21:22 “If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.”

Isa 55:6 Seek the LORD while he may be found: call on him while he is near.

Amos 5:4 This is what the LORD says to the house of Israel: “Seek me and live.”

Psa 34:6 This poor man called, and the LORD heard him: he saved him out of all his troubles.

Psa 61:2 From the ends of the earth I call to you, I call as my heart grows faint; lead me to the rock that is higher than I.

Deu 4:29 But if from there you seek the LORD your God, you will find him, if you look for him with all your heart and with all your soul.

MATHEW 15:22 JESUS CHRIST, SON OF DAVID

Note the woman called Jesus the Son of David. This is significant in understanding what happened. It reveals a limited concept of Jesus. She had apparently heard that the Jews expected a Messiah, a son of the great King David, who was to work miracles for them: and she had heard about Jesus, that He was delivering people from their sicknesses and healing them. However, seeing Jesus only as a miracle worker and healer is an inadequate concept of Him that restricted His working. What the woman needed was to grow, to understand who Jesus really is.

How gracious is our Lord! He knew her heart, every thought and every movement of it. He knew what she needed in order to be brought around to understanding His true Messiahship. Therefore, He began to lead her step by step to understanding His Lordship and to confessing her faith in a humble and worshipping spirit. □

III. *Mathew 15:23–24 Persistence of the Woman*

A persistence that would not quit. The woman faced three major obstacles.

1. There was the silence of Jesus. Note what really happened: the woman’s love and sense of desperation were really seen. She loved so much that she was not going to let Jesus go until He helped her. She kept after Jesus...
 - despite His silence
 - despite the objection of the disciples
 - despite her being undeserving
2. There was the objection of the disciples. It seems that two things happened to the disciples. The woman was creating an embarrassing situation by “crying after” them. Because of their aggravation and because of their life-long training, they judged the lady to be unworthy of Jesus’ help because she was a Gentile. They expected Jesus to

send her away. She must have followed them for some time. Jesus seemed to ignore her, so the disciples assumed He would not help such a despised person. The disciples had two lessons to learn.

- a. Faith has to be awakened in a person's heart before Christ can minister. A person cannot just haphazardly approach Christ at every whim and fancy and expect to receive help. There must be a true and sincere heart, a genuine seeking and an awakened faith. This is apparently what Jesus was doing with the woman: awakening her faith.
 - b. The servant of God must minister from a heart filled with compassion for all. He must minister to the despised as well as to the accepted.
3. There was the strange statement of Jesus that she was undeserving: "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel." There was no rejection whatever in this statement to the woman. It was merely a statement of fact. Jesus had come primarily to the house of Israel while on earth. He had to concentrate on His ministry if He were to achieve His purpose. But why make this statement to the woman? There were apparently two reasons.
- a. The woman needed to learn persistence, humility, and trust.
 - b. The woman needed to learn that there is only one true religion and only one true Messiah. She was a Greek from a proud pagan society. She had been and probably still was a worshipper of false gods; therefore she was *undeserving* of being heard by the *true Messiah* or *true Lord*. She had recognized Christ as the Son of David, as the miracle worker of the Jews who was delivering them from their diseases, but what she needed was to see that He was the only Messiah *of all* and *the only hope* of all. No other religion, no other gods could do anything for her or for anyone else. He alone was her hope. He alone was to be the Lord and Master whom she was to worship. She had to learn the same lesson that the Samaritan woman at the well had to learn: salvation is of the Jews (Jn. 4:22).

Thought 1. There is a difference in the way people seek Jesus and pray.

- 1) There is the prayer of chance or of no expectancy. Many people pray this way. They pray because they think God just might hear. They are not quite sure — they cannot point to any (and certainly not to many) instances when He really did answer, but they pray anyway just in case He might hear.
- 2) There is the prayer of persistence or perseverance, the prayer that will not take "no" or silence for an answer. This was the woman's prayer. She truly loved her daughter and she was desperate. She knew Jesus was her only hope, so she would not quit. She would not be discouraged by anything — not by silence, not by an objection, not even by an apparent rebuff.

Thought 2. There is a great lesson here for believers. The woman was a heathen, yet she knew and did something that so many of us have never learned.

Mat 7:7-8 “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.” (see Luke 18:1-6)

Deu 4:29 But if from there you seek the LORD your God, you will find him, if you look for him with all your heart and with all your soul.

Jer 29:13 You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

Psa 105:4 Look to the LORD and his strength; seek his face always.

IV. Mathew 15:25 Worship

A spirit that worships Jesus as Lord. The woman came to Jesus and *worshipped* Him as Lord. She called Him “Lord” before (v. 22), but now she took the one essential step: she worshipped Him as Lord.

Thought 1. At first, the woman did what so many do: she approached Jesus only as a great man, not as the Lord who is to be worshipped. God, of course, will never honour such a low view of His Son. What is needed is to experience what she did in this verse: a growth in seeing who Jesus really is, the true Lord who is to be worshipped by all.

Mat 7:21 “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.” (see 7:21-23)

Rom 10:9-10 That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.

Rom 10:13 For, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Phil 2:11 And every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

V. Mathew 15:26–27 Humility and Surrender

A spirit of humility and surrender. These words could be interpreted as harsh except for one thing: Jesus never spoke harshly or rejected anyone who came to Him with a desperate need. If a person was truly sincere and had the potential of trusting Him as Lord, He always accepted the person. So whatever happened, we know the words were not meant to be harsh or rejecting.

What do they mean then? Again, Jesus had to move the woman forward in faith and in trust and in a clear understanding of who He really is: the Lord and Master of everyone’s life, not just of the Jews. He is much more than just the Son of David.

He also had to teach her that salvation is of the Jews and that *He is that Salvation*, the Master of all lives. He is telling her this: “It is not right to take the bread of the gospel that belongs to the true worshippers of God and give it to the ‘dogs,’ that is, the heathen.”

The woman was a Greek, a proud people with a rich heritage who despised the Jews. She was a worshipper of false gods, a heathen, an outsider, a sinner; and He was the Messiah, the Master of all lives. Was she willing to humble and surrender herself to Him as the Master of her life?

With great spiritual insight, she clearly saw and confessed in humility that she was nothing spiritually: she was only “a dog”; but being a dog of the family she had the right to eat the crumbs that fell from His table.

Mat 18:4 “Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”

Rom 12:3 For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.

Phil 2:4-5 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.

James 4:10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

Isa 57:15 For this is what the high and lofty One says - he who lives forever, whose name is holy: “I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.”

VI. *Mathew 15:28 Great Faith*

The woman had a great faith. One thing rises above all others in the experience of this mother: she believed that Jesus could meet her need, and she would not let Him go until He met her need. Her belief was so strong that she would not quit — despite being met with silence, irritation, opposition, apparent rebuff and the attitude that she was undeserving (vv. 23-24). There is no way to describe the scene except “Woman, you have great faith.”

Imagine this also: she believed that Christ’s power could overcome space and time. Her daughter was back home! What enormous faith!

But note a critical point: her faith in Jesus’ power, as great as it was, was not enough. Her faith was not what caused Jesus to answer her prayer. What caused Jesus to answer her prayer was her personal humility (surrender) and worship of Him as Lord. Christ answers the prayer and exercises His power on behalf of those who (1) surrender (humble) themselves to Him and (2) worship Him as Lord.

Mat 21:22 *“If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.”*

John 6:29 *Jesus answered, “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.”*

Heb 11:6 *And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.*

1 John 3:23 *And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.*

Thought 1. What is great faith? The steps taken by this dear woman tell us.

- 1) It is a desperate cry of need (v. 22).
- 2) It is a persistence that will not quit (vv. 23-24).
- 3) It is a spirit that worships Jesus as Lord (v. 25).
- 4) It is a spirit of humility and surrender to the Lord (vv. 26-27).
- 5) It is a faith that receives its request (v. 28). ■

MATHEW 15:28 FAITH

There are only two individuals whose faith Jesus pronounced to be great: this woman's and the centurion. It is worth noting that both were Gentiles (Mt. 8:10). □