JESUS AND THE CANAANITE WOMAN

PRECEPT

MATTHEW 15:21-28

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. 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.

PROMISE

In Matthew 15, Jesus encounters a Canaanite woman who begs Him to cure her daughter. Jesus's interaction with the Canaanite woman is really odd. It seems out of character. It's puzzling for most readers, Christians or not, why Jesus would call her a "dog". This passage will provide an excellent learning opportunity in reading the Bible. In the flow of the story, it's clear Jesus is creating a metaphor meant to explain the priorities of His ministry.

A Canaanite woman is considered a ritually unclean person in the times of Jesus. The Canaanites hated the Jews as well and in turn hated by them. The Jews referred to the Canaanites as dogs. When the woman approached and repeatedly asked for healing, the disciples were annoyed and asked Jesus to send her away (Matthew 15:23). At this point, Jesus explained His current ministry in a way that both the woman and the watching disciples could understand. At that time, His duty was to the people of Israel, not to the Gentiles (Matthew 15:24). Recklessly taking His attention from Israel, in violation of His mission, would be like a father taking food from his children in order to throw it to their pets (Matthews 15:26).

Jesus frequently tested people to prove their intentions, often through response questions or challenges. His response to the Canaanite woman is similar. In testing her, Jesus declined her request and explained that she had no legitimate expectation of His help. The woman, however, lived out the principle Jesus Himself taught in the parable of the persistent widow (Luke 18:1–8). Her response proved that she understood fully what Jesus was saying, yet had enough conviction to ask anyway (Matthew 15:27). Jesus acknowledged her faith—calling it "great"—and granted her request (Matthew 15:28).

So, according to both the context and language involved, Jesus wasn't referring to the Canaanite woman as a "dog," either directly or indirectly. He wasn't using a racial slur but making a point about the priorities He'd been given by God. He was also testing the faith of the woman and teaching an important lesson to His disciples. Her daughter was immediately cured after this.

PRACTICE

1. Matthew 15:21-28. What seems strange about this passage? Share your observation to the group.

2. God's Plan. How does the story following the Canaanite woman's encounter with Jesus (the feeding of the 4,000) reveal about God's plan for humanity?

PRAYER

I. Worship Services
• Pray for people to know Christ & have transformed lives.

II. Church
• Pray that our church will always worship and praise God in Spirit and in truth. May there be unity and love among us.

III. Leaders
• May God's call always be fresh in their hearts, renewing and refreshing their spirit for the work ahead.

IV. Life Groups
• Pray for grace and forgiveness among group members. Ask God to create environments of encouragement.

V. Discipleship
• Pray that we will answer the call of God to make disciples and teach people to obey God's commands.

VI. Missionaries
• May God fill each missionary with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.

VII. Gospel
• Pray that God will lead us to opportunities to share His Word to others.